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HISTORIA AND FABULA

*Myths and Legends in Historical Thought
from Antiquity to the Modern Age*

BY

PETER G. BIETENHOLZ



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Es chunnt e chüeli Obeluft,
und an de Halme hangt der Duft.
Denkwohl, mer göhn jez au alsgmach
im stille Frieden unters Dach!
Gang, Liseli, zünd 's Ämpli a!
Mach kei so grosse Dochte dra!

Johann Peter Hebel
Der Abendstern

TO MY SONS

MICHAEL
BALTHASAR
SAMUEL

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PREFACE

This book has been in the making for a long time. It deals with a complex of problems that began to intrigue me thirty years ago, when I was puzzled by Dante's seeming failure to distinguish between historical and mythical personages among the occupants of his *Inferno*. When and where was it, I wondered, that such a distinction began to be made? In the course of the last hundred years surely some scholar or other must have done a comprehensive analysis of the rise and decline of myths and legends in historical writing, so I told myself. Every thinking person today experiences the need to distinguish between fiction and historical fact. Someone must have explored the genesis of that need and the progressive demise of mythistory, so I thought. But not only did I fail to find the book I was looking for, I also discovered that I had misread Dante. He does indeed identify his characters in terms of historicity or lack thereof, but his criteria for doing so differ fundamentally from the ones used today. I had expected to find a steady progression from confusion to enlightenment, but that was obviously not what had occurred. I began to realize that the book I had hoped to find could never have been written. My own book is an attempt to offer a substitute, not a definitive history of the problem, but at least an introduction to some of the intellectual forces that either encouraged the identification of historical facts or continued to obstruct it. It is also an attempt to share with the reader at least some of the tales that came to fascinate me in the course of my explorations.

Over the last decade I was able to devote a fair amount of time to research on my project. For this I have to thank a number of institutions. In the winter of 1985-6 the Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Paris, in conjunction with the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) awarded me a grant for study in Paris and at the Centre d'études de la Renaissance, Tours. In the following spring the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel was my generous host. The University of Saskatchewan contributed a grant from the President's SSHRC Fund for my research in Vienna, in the summer of 1984, a reduced teaching load in 1987-8 and a year of sabbatical leave in 1989-90. Finally, my current fellowship at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in

the Humanities and Social Sciences, while assigned to research on another project, allowed for spare time to revise the manuscript once more. Among the various libraries that have offered me liberal access to their resources I must mention the British Library and the Warburg Institute, University of London, the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, the Universitätsbibliothek Basel, the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, the Biblioteca Hertziana in Rome and, of course, the Library of the University of Saskatchewan. My debt to individual helpers is immeasurable; the least I can do is mention Leonard Forster, Cambridge, Christopher Ligota and David Firth, London, Michael Swan, Saskatoon, and most persevering of all, my wife Doris.

Wassenaar, Easter 1994

SIGLA

CC SL	Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina (Turnhout 1953 -)
Erasmus, ASD	Opera omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami (Amsterdam 1969 -)
Erasmus, LB	Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami opera omnia, ed. J. Le Clerc (Leiden 1703-6, repr. 1961-62)
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae historica, ed. G.H. Pertz et al. (1826 -)
MGH AA	Monumenta Germaniae historica. Auctores antiquissimi (1887 -)
MGH SS	Monumenta Germaniae historica. Scriptores (1826 -)
PG	Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Graeca, ed. J.P. Migne et al (Paris 1857-1912)
PL	Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latina, ed. J.P. Migne et al (Paris 1844-1902)

INTRODUCTION

History is concerned with past events, for instance the Lisbon Earthquake, and with persons no longer alive, for instance Julius Caesar. Historiography renders a written account of past occurrences, actions and thoughts. Historians must know that they cannot reproduce what actually happened. They can only create a literary illusion of past reality, much as painters and photographers create a visible illusion of tangible objects. Like writers of fiction, historiographers must rely on the 'inner eye' to witness the events they wish to describe. They are rarely eye witnesses in the common sense of the word. Moreover, their rendering of the facts is not direct, like a photographer's, but normally based on the medium of written sources. Like the writers of fiction, they will exercise their imagination, but historical imagination is normally focussed on past events which it attempts to analyse and to relate to each other, whereas poetical imagination may freely invent characters and actions.

A historian's work, then, ought to be based on a study of the sources. What is to be passed on to the public is what that study has revealed to the investigating historian. Today it is generally understood that Leopold von Ranke's objective to render the past "wie es eigentlich gewesen"¹ is one that historians should perhaps pursue though they can never hope to reach it. All historical thought is concerned both with things that actually happened — we shall call this here *historia* — and with things that are only supposed to have happened, the supposition being either the historian's own or transmitted by his sources; this we shall call here *fabula*. A commitment to truthfulness and objectivity is always implied in the historian's craft, but any reconstruction of the past must also involve subjective judgements. Fact and fiction — all history must include both; all that is not fact, indeed, all interpretation of the facts, must ultimately fall within the reach of *fabula*. The question arises: was the fictional element recognized in various phases of the development of historical thought and if so, how was its function perceived? Was any

¹ Leopold von Ranke, *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker*, preface of first edition, 1824.

effort made to distinguish between documented facts and accompanying assumptions or deductions? In examining the past, was it deemed important to curb the free play of imagination or was it thought that any explanation, no matter how fanciful and irrational, was better than none? Such is the question that has prompted the writing of this book.

It is important that the purpose of this book be clearly understood, lest the reader approach it with expectations it cannot meet. The following is neither a history of historiography nor a history of mythology. Even the most important developments in, and contributors to, these disciplines will not necessarily call for treatment in this study. My concern is exclusively with the ability and willingness to distinguish and identify factual and non-factual spheres of historical thinking. When we examine the development of historical thought, this question is of central importance. Indeed, it deserves to be asked with regard to every statement concerned with the events of the past. It is clear, however, that on the following pages no more than an infinitesimally small selection of such statements can be discussed — a selection, moreover, that is bound to be arbitrary, since no one can study all of them and make an informed choice. Since I could not hope to be evenhanded in my perusal of the sources, I have followed a natural inclination to deal primarily with such texts as I could read in the original language. The resulting imbalance in favour of European sources, however, is certainly not unprecedented. It is widely held and can indeed be reasoned that Europe has made a unique contribution to the development of historical thought. Thus our investigation, if it is properly conducted, ought to provide some new insights into man's general range of options for viewing the past. At any rate, the conclusions this study will reach may come as a surprise to any one who, like the author himself, started out with the assumption that over time historical thinking has steadily progressed towards a rational separation of fact and fiction or, to put it differently, a demythologization of history.

If *historia* in the following is used to designate the recording of the past on the basis of verifiable evidence (to the extent that historical evidence is verifiable at all), *fabula*, by contrast, will be used to refer to any statement about the past that falls outside the reach of *historia*. No effort will be made to create a rigid terminology by defining various constituents of *fabula*, such as historical fiction, folk tales (sagas), anecdotes, traditions, embellishments, hypothetical inferences and so on. Only the terms *myth* and *legend* will be applied in a

specific and, as far as possible, precise sense. In the terminology of philosophers, theologians, psychologists and also historians, *myth* tends to acquire a variety of usually profound, but frequently also vague, meanings. In this study quite simply a report is termed to be mythical when it relates events that cannot be traced back to recognizable historical facts. The myths that will be examined here are about men rather than gods. They could be termed historical myths, as distinct from religious myths. Although they may be rooted in factual occurrences of which we no longer have any knowledge, the question of the origins of a myth is not as important as its subsequent detachment from historical and topographical data. A myth is transferable from one culture to another and from one tradition to another; it can be grafted on to another persona or another site. Very seldom can we be confident that we have reached the source of a migratory myth, but we may often suppose that it arose from a single set of facts that now lie beyond the reach of historical investigation. On the other hand, the truth inherent in a myth need not have sprung from a specific factual occurrence. Whether or not it did, a myth will reflect an experience that is open to diverse people at different places and different times. It may even lend verbal expression to an abstract concept as yet incapable of conceptualization and formulation. The myth of the marksman who shoots an apple from the head of his child originated in Scandinavia, but it is generally known today thanks to the Swiss hero William Tell. The Swiss form of the myth, unlike others, took root and endured for centuries because it reflected the actual experience of a liberation struggle and anticipated the concept of individual human rights and liberties.

While myth is migratory, the term *legend*, by contrast, will here be taken to refer to a report that, although not verifiable, retains at least some ties with documented historical events or specific geographical locations. These ties prevent a legend from becoming itinerant in the fashion of a myth. According to these definitions Homer, the blind bard, and Ulysses, the daring traveller beyond the limits set to human experience, are mythical figures. Dido is legendary in that many details of her story are specifically related to Carthage, although some others might be deemed mythical. Alexander the Great belongs to history, although his biography was often adorned with legendary and mythical features.

In classical Antiquity as well as in the Christian Middle Ages a definition of *mythos* (in Greek) or *fabula* (in Latin) was favoured that focussed on the contrast with *historia*. If *historia* described things that

had actually happened at some point in the past, *mythos* or *fabula* told things that had not happened then and, in fact, could not possibly happen at any time.² To arrive at this conceptual distinction, one must start out with two more elementary distinctions. One must be prepared to differentiate between reality and imagination and, secondly, between specific points in a lapse of time that stretches from the present back into the past and forward into the future. Simple examples can show how accustomed we have become to making these distinctions. When we decide to watch a videotape about sharks or go to a movie about an airplane hijacking we may of course expect all sorts of emotional thrills, but if we were to put on protective clothing before we switch on the TV or purchase flight insurance on our way to the theatre, we would either have to be mad or at least very eccentric. Likewise, persons who actually believe themselves to be Frederick Barbarossa or Napoleon I are nowadays classified as schizophrenic. Most of us would even think that there is something rather odd about a person who believes himself to have been Barbarossa or Napoleon in an earlier life. Later in this study we shall encounter an enduring belief that Barbarossa and Napoleon, despite all semblances, had not actually died but mysteriously disappeared and would one day return to resume their world-historical missions. To us this is precisely the sort of thing that has not happened and could not possibly happen at any time. What we have found here are segments of a classical myth which we shall call the tradition of the emperor *redivivus*.

To us the distinctions between reality and imagination and between present and past is elementary — so much so that anthropologists must warn us lest we expect automatically to find them in all cultures. Authoritative writers on ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia find that they must seriously address our lack of empathy; it forms a major hurdle to our understanding of the earliest of advanced civilizations. The Egyptians and Mesopotamians pursued a mental path that cuts mercilessly across our own categories of thinking in that it often fails to distinguish between the subjective and the objective, the animate and the inanimate, the living and the dead. Within the framework of our own tradition we have been obliged to develop such tools as allegory and symbolism. They have helped us to cope with the thought

² See below pp. 59-61.

that statues of goddesses and saints may represent abstract qualities and metaphysical powers of healing or protection. We may sometimes lower our rational guards and talk to animals and plants. But we will not think of a stone as animate and purposefully hostile because we failed to watch out and stumbled over it. In short, we are ill prepared for the world of an ancient Egyptian who in one and the same context could describe the king as “the sun, a star, a bull, a crocodile, a lion, a falcon, a jackal, and the two tutelary gods of Egypt — not so much in simile as in vital essence.” To the ancient Egyptian “the elements of the universe were consubstantial ... The terms which he knew best — human behavior — would be the frame of reference for nonhuman phenomena.”³

Analogous to such consubstantiality, the ancient Egyptians experienced what has been termed spatial and temporal coalescence. Coalescence in space occurred when it could be thought that the great temples of Heliopolis, Memphis, Thebes, and also any other sanctuary were built on the spot of the primeval hill, from which the creation took its origins. The experience was concrete and was accepted without the kind of mental transposition that is necessary before we can affirm that the Holy Virgin is spiritually present in a variety of pilgrimage shrines throughout the Christian world. Coalescence in time could take place so long as time was primarily experienced, not as sequence of unique events, but as an unending repetition of such cycles as the turn of day and night, the phases of the moon and the seasons of the year. Just as the sun rises each morning to defeat the night, so the pharaoh, who is the sun-god Rē, will always defeat his enemies. But the pharaoh can also be said to do so specifically on New Year’s morning because the daily and the yearly cycles ultimately coincide.⁴ Indeed, every single pharaoh was also the ultimate godhead, the timeless steward of the “good” (*ma’at*) that had existed from the beginning and would last for ever.⁵

³ H. and H.A. Frankfort, John A. Wilson, Thorkild Jacobsen, William A. Irwin, *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man. An Essay on Speculative Thought in the Ancient Near East* (Chicago 1946) 62f. Wilson’s text deserves to be quoted more fully: “To be sure, a man seems to be one thing, and the sky or a tree seems to be another. But to the ancient Egyptian such concepts had a protean and complementary nature. The sky might be thought of as a material vault above earth, or as a cow, or as a female. A tree might be a tree or the female who was the tree-goddess. Truth might be treated as an abstract concept, or as a goddess, or as a divine hero who once lived on earth....” For the Mesopotamians, see Jacobsen, *ibid.* 149.

⁴ H. and H.A. Frankfort in *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* cit. 20-24.

⁵ John A. Wilson, *The Burden of Egypt* (Chicago 1951) 48f.

As the timeless, archetypical event is for ever being repeated in the present, little incentive is given to developing a consciousness of the past in its own right or, at any rate, to compare and contrast the faint past and the all-absorbing present. It may be said that man in the ancient Near East lived very much in the present. Moreover, it is a common experience that the impact of certain events, especially calamitous ones, leaves one stunned. What causes hurt, and possibly feelings of guilt, tends to seem unprecedented, indeed unique. Temporal and spatial coalescence could not, of course, insulate the ancient Egyptians from such a sense of uniqueness. On some rare occasions they even found words to express how it pierced their static framework of serene mental balance and forced them to contrast the present from what had gone before.

Behold, a calamity happened in my time: the regions of Thinis were violated. It happened in sooth through that which I did, and I (only) knew it after it was done.⁶

Thus a king named Khety confessed in his instructions to his son and successor Merikarē. (9th or 10th dynasty, 22nd or 21st century B.C.). One or two centuries later, in the reign of Sesōstris II, one Khakheperrē-sonb wrote:

I am meditating upon what hath happened, on the things that have come to pass throughout the land. Changes take place; it is not like last year, and one year is more burdensome than the other ... The plans of the gods are destroyed and their ordinances transgressed ... All people alike are transgressors ... I meditate upon what hath happened. Affliction is come to-day ... Hearts are sorrowful ... Every day men rise up early thereto; yesterday in that respect is like to-day.⁷

Evidently right then, Khakheperrē-sonb could no longer view the current events as one of the endless recurrences of the divinely instituted norms. But the aberration from the static pattern of human destiny could not be other than temporary; it was not perceived as

⁶ *The Literature of the Ancient Egyptians*, transl. Adolf Erman, English transl. A. M. Blackman (London 1927) 82. Cf. *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, ed. Miriam Lichtheim (Berkeley 1973-) I 97, 105. It is doubtful whether these instructions were composed by King Khety personally.

⁷ *The Literature of the Ancient Egyptians*, transl. Erman cit. 109f. Cf. *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, ed. Lichtheim cit. I 145-49.

trend-setting. Like everything else it was ultimately due to the inscrutable will of the gods, but more specifically it was due to human failing. It was the logical consequence of human transgression of the divine ordinances. Khakheperrē-sonb's conclusions are of a moral order, not of a historical one. The same can be said of King Khety's confessions. Perhaps a little after Khakeperrē-sonb, the prophet Ipuwer also lamented the breakdown of the moral order:

Nay, but that has perished which was still seen yesterday... Behold a thing has been done, that happened not aforetime.⁸

Ipuwer begins by announcing great calamities: the general rot extends to public institutions and, again, is due to human craft. One brother leaves the other to be murdered and only saves his own skin; the greater man slays the lesser. In the end, however, follows a description of the happy days that the future has in store once men will return to live in accordance with the divine plan.

The Egyptian experience was repeated in Mesopotamia, where amid considerable diversity of peoples and political states a uniform civilization developed before 3000 B.C. and was sustained until the conquests of Alexander the Great and the advent of the Hellenistic age. In Mesopotamia the kings were not usually identified with gods and never were so to the extent that this happened in Egypt. Moreover, in the early periods the kings acted in consultation with popular assemblies, an institution unknown to the Egyptians. Above all, the experience of far less homogeneous political structures may have prevented the intense sense of spatial and temporal coalescence that we had noticed in Egypt. Instead, a scrutiny of past events with a view to differentiation developed, at least in rudimentary fashion. Essentially, however, the Mesopotamians, just like the Egyptians, experienced time as a cyclical movement. As the fortunes of political states rose and fell, they did so not in response to a unique constellation of historical factors, but in keeping with human virtue and vice. States and societies prospered when the king, who in this regard often stood vicariously for the people at large, honoured the divine order which

⁸ *The Literature of the Ancient Egyptians*, transl. Erman cit. 92-108, here 99-101. Cf. *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, ed. Lichtheim cit. I. 149-63.

had been instituted *ab initio* and never changed. When the state collapsed, it must be that the king had disregarded that divine order.⁹

This moral lesson is spelled out with naive bluntness in a Babylonian chronicle probably composed towards the end of the second millennium B.C., the so-called Weidner chronicle. The author equates good government and regard for the divine order quite simply with the punctual observation of religious rites and especially the provision of fish and bread for the temple of Marduk in Babylon. Neglect of these matters equals "oppression" and inevitably leads to divine punishment.¹⁰ When the Persian King Cyrus conquered Babylon in 539 B.C., the local priests of Marduk chose the same moral approach. In texts composed to reflect their own historical tradition as well as to satisfy the propagandist needs of the conquerors, Cyrus is presented as a just and righteous saviour, the instrument of Marduk himself. By contrast his opponent, the last native king of Babylon, Nabunaid, is said to have defied the king of the gods and maltreated his people. Under the Achaemenian rulers who succeeded Cyrus this moral stance was retained, although the propagandist presentation of the past differed in other respects.¹¹

To both the ancient Egyptians and Mesopotamians the reigns of successive kings and entire dynasties offered logical units for the determination of the cycles that, taken together, formed the past. As a result, both showed great diligence in keeping regnal lists. Perhaps the most impressive of these comes from Egypt; it is the so-called Old Kingdom stele, presumably set up in Memphis during the fifth or sixth dynasty (middle of the third millennium B.C.) and derived from annals written on papyrus. Preserved fragments suggest that it attempted to list all the predynastic kings of Egypt as well as the first five dynasties. For the predynastic kings the stele merely indicated whether they had ruled Upper or Lower Egypt or both. At the

⁹ E.A. Speiser in *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East*, ed. R.C. Dentan (New Haven 1955) 35-76, esp. 56ff. Jacobsen in *The Intellectual Adventures of Ancient Man* cit. 128f. William W. Hallo and William Kelly Simpson, *The Ancient Near East. A History* (New York 1971) 175f. Much recent work on Mesopotamian historiography is discussed in John Van Seters, *In Search of History. Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven 1983) 55-99.

¹⁰ *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, ed. and transl. A. K. Grayson (Locust Valley, N.Y. 1975) 43-45, 145-51. Cf. Speiser in *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Dentan cit. 59f. Van Seters, *In Search of History* cit. 56f.

¹¹ George G. Cameron in *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Dentan cit., 77-97, esp. 82-84. *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, ed. Grayson cit. 21f., 105-11.

beginning only the names of the kings were recorded, together with those of their mothers and, for each year of their rule, the height of the Nile during the inundation and one other event. For the later reigns the list was gradually expanded into modest annals, recording coronation rites, the dedication of temples and statues, annual feast of the gods, military campaigns and imports of timber for shipbuilding.¹² It does seem likely that the Old Kingdom stele also listed the gods who were believed to have ruled Egypt prior to the legendary kings of the predynastic age, but it did not attempt in any form to add up the years given for each single king. By contrast, the so-called Turin papyrus, dating from the time of Ramses II, thirteenth century, and another catalogue composed in Greek by the priest Manetho in the third century both attempt to sum up the duration of consecutive reigns and dynasties into subtotals, beginning with the same gods succeeded by heroic demigods and continuing with the kings.¹³ We thus encounter an important step pointing beyond the cyclic vision of the past. The desire to construct an unbroken line of rulers, connecting gods, demigods, heroic and historical kings in that order attests to an ability to view history as a continuous flux. At the same time it militates against any attempt to distinguish between a mythical age and a historical one and between the typical representatives of each.

Just such a distinction between a mythical and a historical age, however, is implied in the Mesopotamian tradition. It is a faint intimation, but capable of vigorous development as it was being passed on to the Hittites and the ancient Jews. From the time of the early Babylonian kingdom some copies of an even more ancient Sumerian regnal list have been recovered. They were executed between 1800 and 1600, approximately, and all of them trace the series of Mesopotamian rulers back to the Flood (of which more will be said shortly, when we turn to ancient Israel). Some copies also include from eight to ten names of antediluvian kings of singular longevity; collectively they were said to have lasted for a quarter or even

¹² The preserved fragments may actually derive from a copy of the original stele, carved at the time of the 25th dynasty; see Hallo and Simpson, *The Ancient Near East* cit. 193f., 202; Ludlow Bull in *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Dentan cit., 1-34, esp. 4-7, 12, 15. *Ancient Records of Egypt. Historical Documents*, ed. James Henry Breasted (Chicago 1906-7) I 51-72.

¹³ Bull in *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East* cit. 5-7. Hallo and Simpson, *The Ancient Near East* cit. 191-93.

half a million years.¹⁴ It is assumed that the antediluvian kings were listed originally in a separate tradition; when this was combined with the list of postdiluvian dynasties, the idea of history was expanded. The Flood continued to mark, as it had before, the point in time from which human history took its beginning, but additionally it became a turning point, linking the distinct ages, one of primeval myth and another of human progression. The perception of the two ages was indeed different. The antediluvian rulers, though not gods, were not ordinary mortals either, witness the length of their lives. Later sources, notably the Babylonian priest Berossus, writing in Greek in the third century B.C. correlated them to seven semidivine sages (*apkallu*) or founding fathers of civilization, credited with the invention of writing, astrology and other arts.¹⁵ The earliest of them, Uanna-Adapa, reappears in Genesis as Adam. Some of Adam's immediate offspring are also reminiscent of the Sumerian tradition; they became the inventors of cattle-raising, music-making and metal-founding. According to the epic of *Gilgamesh* those who found shelter in the "ship" and survived the Flood included not only representatives of the animal species but also every kind of craftsman,¹⁶ so that civilization remained alive as a birthright for the postdiluvians. The novel aspect of the new age and a logical precondition for the orderly succession of mortal kings was political organization. "Kingship was lowered from heaven,"¹⁷ and the people's assembly, also modelled upon the assembly of the gods, was introduced.¹⁸ The Flood thus served as a link between the historical age of mortal man and primeval age of gods, demigods and mythical heroes; at the same time,

¹⁴ *Atra-hasis. The Babylonian Story of the Flood*, ed. and transl. W.G. Lambert and A.R. Millard (Oxford 1969) 15-17, 25.

¹⁵ Van Seters, *In Search of History* cit. 70-72. Robert R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* (New Haven 1977) 79f., 148-52. *The Flood Myth*, ed. Alan Dundes (Berkeley 1988) 29-48, 57-59.

¹⁶ *Gilgamesh*, tablet 11:85.

¹⁷ This formula is used in the Sumerian regnal list following the Flood. It was also prefixed to the section listing the antediluvian kings in cases where these were given. In this case the formula was repeated after the Flood, with the implication that society had to be organized afresh. The earliest postdiluvian kings figuring on the list, including the "divine" hero Gilgamesh, were still said to have ruled for hundreds of years (as against the tens of thousands of years of the antediluvian kings), but the regnal years were soon reduced to human proportions. See *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton, N.J. 1950) 265f.

¹⁸ Hallo and Simpson, *The Ancient Near East* cit. 29-32, 165. Speiser in *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Dentan cit. 50-53.

however, it set the ages apart. The goddess Ishtar emphasizes the chasm when she accepts her share of responsibility for the Flood:

In truth, the olden time has turned to clay,
Because I commanded evil in the assembly of the gods!

But at the same time she causes her fellow gods to repent their action and comes close to giving a pledge that it will not be repeated ever:

O ye gods here present, as surely as I shall not forget the lapis lazuli
on my neck,
I shall remember these days and shall not forget (them) ever!¹⁹

The Mesopotamians had a mathematical bent and excelled in devising systems of chronology. In addition to regnal lists, a substantial volume of other historical records has been recovered from Mesopotamian excavation sites. These include Assyrian and Babylonian annals and chronicles. Similar material came to light in Asia Minor as the cities of the Old and New Hittite Empires (sixteenth to thirteenth centuries B.C.) were being explored. In view of the intensive relations between the Indogermanic Hittites and their Mesopotamian neighbours, the new evidence prompted many comparisons between their ways of viewing the past. Autobiographical texts by Hittite kings and treaties between the latter and their vassals were also found to be relevant to such inquiries. The question of mutual influences is a subject of animated controversy among specialists.²⁰ For the purposes of this study it is sufficient to retain that the Hittite and Mesopotamian traditions, taken together, are generally seen to represent considerable progress in historical thinking and also to raise further questions about a possible influence upon the Mycenaean and Ionian cultures of ancient Greece. The Hittites and Mesopotamians both were in the habit of keeping records of contemporary events. Both also demonstrated a will to sift and sort the records of the past. They were thus able to view past events in order of succession and also to compose accounts that could serve to explain and even justify current situations and actions. While

¹⁹ *Gilgamesh*, tablet 11:118-19, 164-65; the transl. is by Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (Chicago 1946).

²⁰ John Van Seters surveys such recent debates in his chapters on Mesopotamian and Hittite historiography, himself arguing in favour of the originality and superiority of the Mesopotamian tradition; see his *In Search of History* cit., 55-126.

political propaganda was definitely one of the desired ends, this historiography also exposes an antiquarian taste for sequences as well as an early and limited desire to determine cause and effect.

In the field of myth the Hittites seem to have recognized the superb quality of the Babylonian epic of *Gilgamesh*, which they eagerly copied and translated. On the other hand, some of their historical prose texts show a liveliness and spontaneity of style that is unmatched elsewhere in the Near East.²¹ We have seen that the Mesopotamian Flood stories marked a resolve to distinguish between a remote or even timeless age of myth and another age of human enterprise, primarily current affairs. That same resolve may be discovered in Hittite literature, which treats contemporary or recent public events quite differently from the age of timeless myth and the more distant past that needed to be reconstructed from all kinds of historical records. In the Hittite myths gods can freely interact with men; if a location is indicated at all, they are found to roam through the lands of men as easily as through their own heavenly kingdom. But the Hittites were no longer content to attribute past successes and failures solely to divine recompense and retribution. In some notable instances human agents replace divine ones in the records of the historical past as kings and royal officials are being assessed in terms of the skill they have demonstrated. The records normally take the form of selective summaries, arranged with a specific unifying theme and political purpose in mind. The occasion may be a royal decree or an international treaty. Such documents called for a historical introduction; the Hittites were evidently accustomed to judge a new situation in the light of precedent. Finally, when Hittite kings had occurrences of their own time recorded — normally in first person singular — circumstances and motives alike are reported with great liveliness. A famous example from the middle of the fourteenth century B.C. is the Egyptian marriage proposal that was recorded in the annals of King Shuppiluliuma compiled by his son Murshili II. Shuppiluliuma's surprise and excitement in view of the Egyptian *démarche* temporarily give way to prudent mistrust, to which the

²¹ James G. Macqueen, *The Hittites and Their Contemporaries in Asia Minor* (London 1975) 145, 147f. Albrecht Goetze, *Hethiter, Churriter und Assyrier* (Oslo 1936) 73.

queen of Egypt in turn reacts with understandable pique but also with renewed insistence.²²

Nowhere, however, did either the Mesopotamians or the Hittites betray an abiding interest in treating *historia* and *fabula* as distinct, even incompatible, spheres. The Babylonians considered it as quite appropriate to find the same historical persons and events presented to them in mythical epics, historical epics that developed many legendary features, and also in sober chronicles of military campaigns and in authentic inscriptions. The great Sargon of Akkad (2334-2279 B.C.), in particular, figures in inscriptions that were copied time and again, also in many chronicles and even in a rich legendary tradition; the very significance of the subject seems to have called for treatment in diverse literary genres.²³ Likewise, a famous treaty between the Hittite King Hattushili III and Ramses II of Egypt (c. 1280 B.C.) justifies the new accord on the basis both of pristine relations between the gods of either nation and of a preceding treaty that had been invalidated by intervening warfare.²⁴

Roughly in the period when that treaty was concluded Aramaic semi-nomads crossed the Jordan and began to settle in Palestine; the Jewish tribes were entering their future homeland and our historical spectrum at the same time. If one wishes to discover the idea of history that was developing in ancient Israel, one must turn to the Bible. Yet, paradoxically, the most fitting place for the Old Testament in this study will not come for quite a while. It was not until the eighteenth century A.D., the 'Age of Reason,' that the truth of many of its stories was open to persistent questioning, that it was put to scrutiny with the specific purpose of straining out *fabula* and retaining *historia*.

²² H.G. Güterbock ed. "The Deeds of Šuppiluliuma as told by his son, Muršili II" *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 10 (1956) 41-68, 75-98, here 94-98; also translated, among other relevant Hittite texts, in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, ed. Pritchard cit., 120ff., 318f. Macqueen, *The Hittites* cit. 147f. Van Seters, *In Search of History* cit. 101, 116ff. Harry A. Hoffner, "History and Historians of the Ancient Near East : The Hittites" *Orientalia* 49 (1980) 283-332.

²³ Speiser in *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Dentan cit. 49, 54; Van Seters, *In Search of History* cit. 93; Hallo — Simpson, *The Ancient Near East* cit. 54-59.

²⁴ *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, ed. Pritchard cit. 199-203, offers both the Egyptian and the Hittite version in translation. The Egyptian text, from which this detail is taken, is said to be copied from the silver tablet sent by Hattushili. The fiction of the pristine treaty was mentioned already in the memoirs of Muršili II: "Then my father asked for the tablet of the treaty again, (in which there was told) ... how the Storm God concluded a treaty between the countries of Egypt and Hatti, and how they were continuously friendly with each other;" see Güterbock ed. "The deeds of Šuppiluliuma as told by his son, Muršili II" cit. 98.

It is here, however, that we should note how the archaic perception of the past was developed and transformed by the Bible. The Old Testament, as we know it, is a composite of redactions, and the work of its editors always reflected their interpretation of what had been transmitted to them. Thus the history of scriptural interpretation had begun long before the Old Testament canon, as we know it, was fully assembled, and the history of Christian interpretation of that canon is as old as Christianity itself. Over the centuries a veritable deluge of scholarly attention has been showered upon the Book of Books. Foolhardy though the endeavour may seem, we must here attempt a brief discussion of the historical tradition that took shape on the pages of the Old Testament, for it is this tradition more than any other that eventually led to the modern concept of history. Indeed, one may wonder what other people had ever equalled the Jews in understanding themselves as a unique outcome of incomparable historical entities. Neither the Greeks nor the Romans were so assiduous in looking back over their shoulders to the long and tortuous road they had come thus far. Perhaps not until the heyday of modern historicism, the times of Herder and the Romantics, did the past count for so much — for so much more than it does to most of us today.

In a number of ways ancient Jewish culture is now seen to be comparable to the neighbouring civilizations of Egypt and the Near East, and even influenced by them. In other ways it was unique; even critical assessments cannot avoid this conclusion. Like their neighbours, the ancient Jews were eager to safeguard awareness of the past for themselves and for future generations. Yet ancient Israel stands alone in leaving behind no historical documents: no epigraphical records,²⁵ no treaties, no royal proclamations, no annals and such like. We do have, however, plenty of laws, a number of genealogies and a great deal of chronicle text — incorporated, all of it, in the canon of the Old Testament and its apocrypha. In fact, the greater part of the Old Testament is an account of Israel's past, or more precisely, it is several accounts, continuous or disjointed, often interwoven with one another. A few of them appear to be first hand, but normally they are interpretative redactions of earlier material.

²⁵ According to the author of Joshua 4.5-7, Joshua had stone slabs placed to commemorate the crossing of the Jordan. Apparently the author imagined them without inscription, for the meaning of the monument was to be passed on orally from generation to generation. In 2 Samuel 18.18 Absalom is said to have erected a pillar in the King's Valley; cf. Millar Burrows in *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Dentan cit. 99-131, esp. 101f.

Some are repetitive and sometimes they contradict each other; in some instances an attempt is made to harmonize the contradictions. The chroniclers show little concern for chronology, for supporting evidence and for the analysis of events in terms of historical causes and effects. On the other hand, they are most conscientiously aware of causes and effects in the guise of human failing and repentance and of divine promise, punishment and redemption.

When the Old Testament canon was fully assembled the omnipresence of Yahweh, the one and only god of Israel, came majestically into view as the driving force of universal history from its beginning to its end. Yahweh created the world and appointed his chosen people; he led them to their settlement in the promised land and to the short apogee of national grandeur when David and Solomon ruled and the Temple was built. Yahweh punished and tested his people through catastrophic plagues, defeats and exiles; but abandon them he would not. In the end he would send the Messiah to establish his kingdom — a kingdom that came eventually to be seen in eschatological light. Here, for the first time, a scheme of universal history in linear progression was developed. It was composed of the varied elements of a rich tradition, much of it presented with unprecedented narrative skill. Primordial myths, such as the Creation and Flood stories,²⁶ folk tales, such as the adventures of Samson and the slaying of the giant Goliath,²⁷ and etiological legends, such as the tales of Cain and Abel and of the Tower of Babel, were combined with the properly historical chronicle of the successive kings of Judah and Israel and, of course, the superb account of the lives and times of David and Solomon, written perhaps by a contemporary or, at any rate, by some one who had access to formal records such as the lists of David's victories and his officials in 2 Samuel 8. In its simplest and clearest form the idea of linear progression was expressed in a wealth of genealogies. Linking the Old Testament to the New, they would eventually span the entire past from Adam to Jesus and would afterwards become the source of unending speculations about the age of the world and the date of Creation. The Jewish genealogies are strikingly different from the regnal lists encompassing gods, demigods and human kings that we have encountered in Egypt and Mesopotamia.

²⁶ For the vast body of material similar to the Jewish accounts see James George Frazer, *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament* (London 1918) I, and *The Flood Myth*, ed. Dundes, cit.

²⁷ David's heroic feat (1 Samuel 17) is also attributed to Elhanan, son of Jaare-oregim (2 Samuel 21.18-19).

Not only do gods find no place on them — a theogony is utterly incompatible with the worship of Yahweh — , but even the kings make their appearance at a late stage. The genealogical chain begins with ordinary folk, farmers and shepherds; in the place of dynasties and kingdoms we find plain families. The earliest links in the chain are mythical or legendary; not until Abraham can we suspect faint traces of historicity. Yet Adam and Eve, Cain, Abel and Noah, despite their longevity, are not divine heroes, the likes of Gilgamesh and Hercules. In so far as history can be equated with the past of man, one may speak here of a historicization of primordial myths. The past is no longer divided into the twin ages of superhuman myth and human history. The timeless omnipresence of Yahweh runs continually parallel with the chain of human generations. But even though the past is constantly populated with humans, the Flood triumphantly reappears as a decisive turning point. From our own perspective, which of course is irrelevant to the outlook of the ancient Jews, it may be said to separate a primordial age of historicized myth from the subsequent age of history and thus to present a basic and simple scheme of periodization of universal history that was later repeated in the familiar bipartition of the past into a period before and another after the birth of Christ.

No myth could be more archetypical than the tale of the all-engulfing Flood. Varieties of it were found in ancient Mesopotamia, Israel and Greece, further in China, India, the Indian archipelago and the Pacific islands, in North and South America, in Iceland, Lithuania and Transylvania; however, no clear, or at any rate no substantial, traces of the tale are reported from Egypt and the rest of Africa, from Iran, Central Asia and Japan.²⁸ While some of these traditions may have independent origins, the biblical tale was very likely derived from Mesopotamia, where the story was evidently common knowledge by the time the old Sumerian regnal list was composed, which is to say, many centuries before it can be traced in another culture. In our context the investigation of parallels and discrepancies between the

²⁸ Frazer, *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament* cit. I. For Africa see *The Flood Myth*, ed. Dundes, cit. 249-59. The Chinese tradition is known only from late and faint echoes in the systematizing historiography of the Han period (206 B.C. — 220 A.D.). See e.g. the rationalization of Ssuma-Ch'ien: *Les Mémoires historiques de Se-Ma Ts'ien*, trad. and annot. Edouard Chavannes (Paris 1895, repr. 1967) I 98-103; cf. Bernhard Karlgren, "Legends and Cults in Ancient China" *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 18 (Stockholm 1946) 199-365, esp. 218f., 227. The Indian tale was probably derived from the Mesopotamian tradition: see R.A. Jairazbhoy, *Foreign Influence in Ancient India* (Bombay 1963) 34f.

Mesopotamian and the Jewish traditions can be restricted to one aspect. What is new and different, we need to ask, in the postdiluvian age in comparison to its antediluvian predecessor? The parallels are obvious. In Genesis, as in the Sumero-Babylonian tradition, the Deluge does not mark the beginning of all civilization. When Noah is presented as tiller of the soil and the first vintner (Genesis 9.20-21), he is seen in the same etiological perspective as some of his antediluvian forebears. Adam and Cain were also said to have tilled the soil; Abel was a shepherd. Cain built a city, while Jabal was the father of the tent-dwellers, Jubal invented music and Tubal-cain the blacksmith's craft.²⁹ The novelty of the postdiluvian age, in both the Mesopotamian and Jewish traditions, is a social contract. In the former both kingship and the people's assembly had come down from heaven. In Genesis, however, we find a truly new feature. The Flood is followed by the covenant, an event of unparalleled importance in the history of Israel. The Hebrew word for 'covenant' is repeated no less than seven times in Genesis 9.8-17, where Yahweh gives a solemn pledge to Noah on behalf of his descendants and all living creatures that were gathered in the ark. Yahweh's promise, sealed by the appearance of the rainbow, is that no second deluge is ever to happen. This is the first in the Old Testament "series of concentric covenants,"³⁰ and it is followed by the more exclusive and specific covenant, which Yahweh makes with Abraham, promising him and his descendants "the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession" and crowning that promise with the pledge "And I will be their God" (Genesis 17.8).

The covenant represents the most remarkable feature in Israel's view of itself and its history. In fact, it represents the initial constituent and the lasting foundation of that history. Nothing remotely like it is found in the tradition of other nations. To understand the full significance of this unique pact, one only needs to compare it with a more primitive facet of the Flood story, which was also retained as part of the account in Genesis. On leaving the ark after the waters had receded, both Noah and his Mesopotamian counterpart, Utnapishtim, duly begin the new life cycle with offerings to their gods. According to the *Gilgamesh* epic (11.161), the gods, suffering from the lengthy disruption of human oblations caused by the Flood, "gathered like

²⁹ Genesis 3.23, 4.2, 17, 21-22.

³⁰ Burrows in *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Dentan cit. 124.

flies over the sacrificer.” Yahweh too, in Genesis 8.21, is at first shown to react in anthropomorphic fashion. He “smelled the pleasing odour” of Noah’s burnt offerings. There follow divine blessings — in the *Gilgamesh* the apotheosis of Utnapishtim and his wife, in Genesis a pledge for future fertility and sustenance. In comparison with such palpable rewards, the grant of the covenant represents quite a different level of spirituality and intelligence; it is due no doubt to a late, priestly redaction of the Flood tale. As a blend of early and late elements the tale marks, in some ways at least, a significant change in the biblical account of the past. At first Genesis dealt with the origin of all mankind. It offered its own version of the Creation myth, enriched with the theologizing parable of the fall of man, and a primeval genealogy, enriched with some genealogical legends. After the Flood, the character of the narrative changes. The account quickly turns to Abraham, who is made out to be a descendant of Noah’s son Shem and becomes the father of Yahweh’s chosen people. With him we may well have reached the first traces of historicity; more importantly, the account is now directed to its absorbing theme, the nation of Israel described in its beginnings, progress and setbacks, seen from a contemporary perspective. In that sense the Flood marks a turn from myth to history or, one might venture to say, more precisely a turn from historicized myth³¹ to mythologizing history. Historical events — that is, events judged to be historical by the biblical narrator — are presented in terms that emphasize the analogy with famous precedents which thus become endowed with archetypal qualities. The most significant case in point, Yahweh’s repeated covenants with his people, has just been mentioned. Another example is Joshua 3.7-17. After the death of Moses, the wanderings of his flock draw finally to an end. Yahweh lets it cross the Jordan and settle in the Promised Land. The crossing of the river is made possible, as

³¹ See above p. 16; cf. e.g. Johannes Hempel, *Geschichten und Geschichte im Alten Testament bis zur persischen Zeit* (Gütersloh 1964) 57; Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York 1981) 23-46; *The Poet and the Historian. Essays in Literary and Historical Biblical Criticism* ed. Richard Elliott Friedman (Chico, California 1983) 3-4 and passim. It is true that examples for the historicization of archetypal elements can also be found after the Flood story. Moses’ magical staff, for instance, reflects a topos. A magical staff is also introduced in Ugaritic literature, when Baal kills his opponent, the seven-headed Sea-god; see Cyrus H. Gordon in *Biblical Motifs; Origins and Transformations* ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, Mass. 1966) 1-9. Robert Alter draws attention to Esau’s resemblance with Enkidu of the *Gilgamesh* epic and notes that to the early rabbinic commentators Esau, who is also called Edom, “the red,” becomes the typological harbinger of future evils, as his country of Edom is seen as a prefiguration of Rome.

was the crossing of the Red Sea at the time of the exodus from Egypt, by Yahweh who stops the flow of water for a while. The analogy is rendered explicit when Yahweh tells Joshua (3.7): "as I was with Moses, so I will be with you." It is equally explicit when Isaiah (Is. 10.26-27, 11.15-16) announces Yahweh's pledge to end the Babylonian exile, and with Psalm 114 it enters the domain of liturgy. This mode of thinking is demonstrated so frequently that it may be termed habitual to the biblical authors. It is not cyclical in the sense of perpetual recurrence of the same events; rather it emphasizes the same unfailling pattern of divine causation in successive and independent occurrences.³² Divine intervention, then, is the outstanding characteristic of Old Testamental history. It is quite possible that the biblical editors who reworked the archaic traditions of their people did not believe every detail to be literally true and thus felt all the more at liberty to introduce their own embellishments. But the fundamental historicity of the scriptural narrative was always guaranteed by this pattern of divine intervention. What was elaborated here was a sacred history, whose authors were quickly credited with divine inspiration. Once an authoritative canon was established, no pious reader would be free to suspect the presence of even a crumb of *fabula* in the Holy Writ. This prohibition was to hold true for the entire Middle Ages as it still holds true for fundamentalist Christians today.

This study is concerned with an aspect of historical thinking in the Western tradition. It seemed appropriate to begin it with a brief discussion of those ancient civilizations that were, directly or indirectly, tributaries to the stream of that tradition. By the same token, it will be necessary to ignore all cultures that do not manifestly fall into this category. Ancient India shared a number of myths with other cultures farther to the west, but the idea of history that she developed was probably too rudimentary³³ to elicit any echo in the West. Only in passing it may be noted that the concept of four consecutive ages (*yugas*) in the past of mankind must have existed in the Vedic tradition long before any Western parallels can be traced. In the *Mahābhārata* (c. 4th century B.C.) we first encounter — although it may of course be much older — the idea of progressive deterioration from age to age, analogous to the declining metallic ages

³² Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford 1985) 354-60.

³³ Michael Edwardes, *Everyday Life in Ancient India* (London 1969) 1.

in Hesiod and the the Book of Daniel. Some centuries later the *Purānas* also specify the duration of each *yuga*. The *Krita yuga* lasted 4800 years of the gods and was characterized by complete righteousness of the human race. The *Tretā yuga* lasted 3600 god years, and righteousness accordingly declined by one fourth. In the following *Dvāpara* and *Kali yugas* the duration and the level of righteousness were again reduced by one fourth in each case.³⁴ In any event, the experience of ancient India can only support the conclusions suggested by our examination of the ancient Near East. Great myths were created, and basic patterns of historical thinking were developed, which sometimes attained a high degree of sophistication and rational systematization. But nowhere do we discover a clear perception of antinomy between *fabula* and *historia*, and even less a persistent effort to assign the records of the past to the province of either one or the other. To find these latter ideas developing, we have to turn to Greece.

³⁴ R.N. Saletore, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Culture* (New Delhi 1984-85) V, s.v. "Yuga." K.P. Bahadur, *A History of Indian Civilization* (New Delhi 1979-) I 1f.

CHAPTER ONE

THE GRAECO-ROMAN PERIOD

I

Greece

What to us is history, namely the endeavour to understand ourselves as the outcome of developments that have evolved over time, is largely a gift we received from the inquisitive mind of the ancient Greeks. It is true that to the systematic thinkers of classical Antiquity history was not an independent discipline in the epistemological sense and that the Jews, and possibly other ancient nations, surpassed the Greeks in their efforts to accumulate a record of past events. But it is the Greeks who most clearly manifested an early desire to face the questions with which this book is concerned. Before the Greeks thought of history, they had gathered a treasure-house full of captivating myths. Whenever they turned to history, they were at pains to clear some space for it in their minds filled with myths and legends. Once a separate place was found, some fencing had to be put in place, lest myths and legends would sweep right back.

Myth, the way we have defined it, is timeless. Yet many myths were told in answer to a question that reflects an elementary consciousness of time. This question is: where did such and such begin? In his *Theogony* Hesiod (c. 700 B.C.) tells us that the Muses never tire of singing the praises of the Olympian gods. Their song covers "that which is, that which will be and that which was aforetime," but they begin with the beginning. Their glorification of the immortals sets in *ex archēs* (from the start, from of old) with "those whom the earth and the vast sky begot, and those gods that were born of these." And so likewise, *ex archēs*, does Hesiod repeat their tale, beginning "with that which happened first."¹ It is true that the question as to what came first led Hesiod and some subsequent

¹ Hesiod, *Theogony* 38, 45f., 115. *Ex archēs* is used eight times in the *Theogony*; additionally, *apo archēs* is used in another instance. Homer appears to use the term less often.

Greek authors to an inquiry that is more philosophical than historical.² But the same natural curiosity lies at the root of the countless tales of founders of cities and dynasties that formed an accepted part of history until the Renaissance.

In Hesiod's *Works and Days* we find the tale of Pandora. In passing the poet mentioned how Prometheus stole the fire from Zeus in order to give it to the mortals. Acquiring the skill of making a fire might well be presented as a turning point in history, but Hesiod did not see in it, as we might today, the great invention that ended the earliest stage of primitive mankind and opened the way to human civilization.³ Instead he was led to a philosophical assessment of the human condition. Pandora's gifts deprive mankind of its ideal existence free of pain and turn it into a race of toiling sufferers. There was more to be said, though. "If you so desire," Hesiod went on, "I shall add another tale for good measure (*heteron logon ekkoryphōsō*)."⁴ His second account of the development of mankind presents the earliest known version of a splendid historical myth. It is the tale of four successive metallic ages or, as Hesiod says, races: gold, silver, bronze, leading down to the current race of iron. The latter is described in much the same terms as post-Pandoric mankind, but the identification is not made explicit. There is also an addition which reinforces the presence of *historia*, while awkwardly disrupting the flow of symbolism in the *fabula*. Wedged in between the bronze and iron ages, a short account is given of another race — the race of the mythical heroes that perished in the wars of Thebes and Troy.⁴

While the tale of the five races represents an elementary system of periodization and thus a rudiment of historical chronology, time as such remains throughout the unspecifiable time of myth. No comparison between myth and history is suggested, let alone a conflict between them. On the other hand, Hesiod does demonstrate an understanding of the ambiguity of myth with regard to factual truth. "At some point" — mythical time —, when he is tending his sheep, the Muses begin to instruct him in the subject matter of the *Theogony*. They begin with a remarkable salutation, which shows the poet

² Moses I. Finley, *The Use and Abuse of History* (New York 1975) 11-33.

³ For an imaginative assessment of the impact which the acquisition of fire has had, see William Golding, *The Inheritors* (London 1955).

⁴ Hesiod, *Works and Days* 42-201. Cf. Finley, *The Use and Abuse of History* cit. 16f. The other account of the four metallic ages that exercised an influence comparable with Hesiod's is in Daniel 2.31-45.

veering from good-humoured disrespect for his own person to confidence in his professional talent. This is how the Muses address him and his fellow-shepherds:

“Shepherds of the fields, evil things of shame, bellies only! We know to speak full many things that wear the guise of truth, and we know also when we will to utter truth.” So spake the eloquent daughters of mighty Zeus. And they gave me a staff, even a branch of lusty olive, wondrous to pluck, and breathed in me a voice divine that I might celebrate the things that shall be and the things that were aforetime.⁵

The audience is warned; the lore of things past and future that the bard has learnt from the Muses embraces both facts and realistic fiction. Those who wish to distinguish between them must use their own judgement. The Muses won’t tell, nor will Hesiod. Would Herodotus tell?

Herodotus, the “father of history,”⁶ lived some two and a half centuries after the composition of the Hesiodic poems. In several ways he did help the reader spot differences between *fabula* and *historia*. But while he was offering a helping hand, the sea of uncertainty itself kept growing as he discovered new complexities in his inquiry. He seems to have asked himself consistently whether the information available to him made rational sense, and thus, up to a point, he was encouraging his readers to do likewise. But often he was not sure that the answer mattered; at least it did not seem to matter so much as to rule out the telling of an implausible tale. Many of the Greek, Egyptian and Persian traditions Herodotus had gathered in his book must indeed have seemed implausible to him and sometimes he did say so. But even when the reported actions were patently fanciful, Herodotus rarely questioned the existence of the actors. This distinction also applies when his inquiry was more properly historical. If one wanted to know who among the Greeks had first “ruled over the sea” by means of naval power, one could not discard the possibility that Minos of Cnossus or another hero of yet an earlier age had done so. In terms of “the so-called human race,” however, Polycrates was the first.⁷ What remained doubtful was not the

⁵ Hesiod, *Theogony* 26-32. The translation is by A.W. Mair (Oxford 1908).

⁶ Cicero, *De legibus* 1.2.5; R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford 1946) 19, 28.

⁷ Herodotus 3.122; cf. T. P. Wiseman, *Clio's Cosmetics* (Leicester 1979) 145f. Luciano Canfora, “L’inizio della storia secondo i Greci” *Quaderni di Storia* 17 no. 33 (1991) 5-19.

existence of Minos and other mythical heroes, but merely their unreliably reported actions.

Herodotus was well aware of two different forms of inquiry into the past. One could travel around and ask questions, both of one's self and of people in the know. That was *historia* (the Greek word meaning 'inquiry'), the technique, in which he excelled and which he applied to the past as well as to current issues. If it did not produce results, for instance because the events were too remote, one could listen to the bards and their epics of olden days, and one would learn *mythoi*.⁸ In either case the criterion of plausibility could be applied, if one so chose, but rare was the instance where one could confidently say that *historia* was yielding truth and *mythos* falsehood. Both distinctions, history as against myth and truth as against falsehood, were basically separate, and both were optional, rendered inconsequential by the sovereign right of each *logos* (tale) to be told, or more precisely to tell itself.⁹ The issue came down to personal inclination, and while the problem of plausibility intrigued Herodotus and was frequently tackled, the distinction between myth and history was treated as if it were a waste of time and rarely raised in an explicit fashion.

Nevertheless, the basic distinction between *historia* and *mythos* (or, to use the terminology of modern scholarship, a *spatium mythicum* and a *spatium historicum*), though rarely explicit, prompted two ancillary clarifications of some importance. In the first place Herodotus often demonstrated an awareness of the difference between mythological and historical time. Mythical events occurred at an indefinite time, and usually Herodotus did not attempt to date them. It is true that on occasion he employed vague chronological references, normally in terms of generations. But even these, it seems, were simply part of the

⁸ For Herodotus' use of the term *mythos* see below p. 26f. Two famous passages show the difference between the two kinds of investigation. 2.99: "Up to here my own sight, my own judgement and my own inquiry have spoken, but from here on I am going to relate the Egyptian tales as I have heard them." 1.5: "So this is how the Persians and Phoenicians say it happened, and I am not going to say whether it happened like this or in another fashion. What I have learnt personally is this ..." See C.R. Ligota, "This Story is not True.' Fact and Fiction in Antiquity" *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 45 (1982) 1-13, esp. 5.

⁹ The importance of this nuance is pointed out by Ligota, "This Story is not True..." cit. 5. He quotes Herodotean formulations such as "my *logos* constrains me" and "from the start my *logos* has looked for digressions."

material he had gathered and was now relating to his readers.¹⁰ Inconsistencies were passed on without comment, and rarely did he try to establish a chronological relationship between events belonging to the realm of myth. Although he may well have observed a general principle of structure, the first part of his work has the appearance of a diffuse mass of tales and traditions. His own ability to date events realistically reached back three generations, no more, and he could not expect his readers to do better. All he could do for earlier events was choosing a point of supposed synchronism, from which he traced a peculiar development backward to an even more obscure past, thus creating excursus after excursus. This stands in sharp contrast with the second, properly historical, part of his work, which Fordyce Mitchel describes as "the tight drama of the Persian wars with its continuous story, concentrated scene, and straight-forward chronology."¹¹ The case of the sixth-century writer Hecataeus of Miletus¹² serves to demonstrate Herodotus' understanding. Hecataeus is fooling himself when he attempts to connect human time with mythical time. In the course of sixteen generations he traced his own genealogy back to a god. But the priests of Thebes show to him - and later to Herodotus himself - the statues of 345 consecutive high priests, all of whom had been entirely human. If not a single god or hero was to be found in so many generations, how could Hecataeus claim a divine ancestor in only sixteen? And how much then could one trust the Spartan royal genealogy, which reached back to Hercules in roughly the same number of generations?¹³ It is, however, typical of Herodotus that he did not explicitly ask this question.

¹⁰ See e.g. Herodotus 7.204, 8.131, cf. 6.52, for the Spartan royal genealogy reaching back to Hercules. The pattern itself is untypical of the Greek way of thinking but reminiscent of the Near East (cf. above pp. 8-10). Herodotus himself was clearly impressed with the Egyptians' chronological calculations based on their genealogical lists of gods and kings, which had no match anywhere in Greece; see 2.100, 142-46. See also W. den Boer, "Herodot und die Systeme der Chronologie" *Mnemosyne* 4th ser. 20 (1967) 30-60. P. Vidal-Naquet, "Temps des dieux et temps des hommes" *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 157 (1960) 55-80. In general Finley, *The Use and Abuse of History* cit. 17f., 27.

¹¹ Fordyce Mitchel, "Herodotus' Use of Genealogical Chronology" *Phoenix* 10 (1956) 48-69, here 66. Mary E. White, "Herodotus' Starting-Point" *Phoenix* 23 (1969) 39-48.

¹² Herodotus 2.143. The surviving fragments of Hecataeus' writings have generated much scholarly discussion. His critical bent may have led him to attempt a rationalization of the genealogies at his disposal rather than a distinction between mythical and historical times. See *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* ed. Felix Jacoby, new ed. (Leiden 1950-62.) I, esp. F. 1 and Jacoby's commentary, p. 562; Charles William Fornara, *The Nature of History in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Berkeley 1983) 4-12.

¹³ See above n. 10.

The second area in which Herodotus moved toward a distinction between *mythos* and *historia* is his differential treatment of the traditional tales about the gods and about human heroes. The mythology of the gods demanded a measure of pious restraint that he felt free to abandon when dealing with heroic figures of the human kind. A storm that wreaks havoc among the squadrons of the Persian fleet may or may not be the result of entreaties, which the Athenians addressed to the wind-god Boreas. They believed it was; as for Herodotus, "I cannot say" is all he was prepared to put on record. Again the end of that storm can be attributed either to the incantations of the Persian magi and their offerings to the goddess Thetis "or it happened in some other way that the wind dropped all of its own."¹⁴ On inspecting a gorge in Thessaly, Herodotus concluded that it must have been caused by an earthquake. Now if one believes that it is the god Poseidon who is shaking the earth, then the local tradition, which sees in the gorge a result of Poseidon's activity, makes sense.¹⁵ At the beginning of his book on Egypt Herodotus states categorically: "I am not inclined to relate what I have heard from the mouth [of the Egyptian priests] about their gods, apart from their names. For I believe that men everywhere have equal knowledge of the gods. I will record, however, such recollections as my argument requires."¹⁶ When exploring the causes of events and phenomena, Herodotus was persistently reluctant to resort to the argument of divine intervention and thus he initiated a marked divergence between the Greek approach and that of the ancient Orient, as we have examined it in the Introduction.

Herodotus used the term *mythos* only twice; in both cases it means a story that does not stand up to rational analysis.¹⁷ One occurrence is particularly interesting; the argument is about the cult of Hercules, in fact of two Hercules. One, wholly divine, was worshipped in Egypt from time immemorial and at least five generations before the appearance in Greece of another Hercules, son of Amphitryon and Alcmene. Therefore a dual veneration seemed to Herodotus a most

¹⁴ Herodotus 7.189, 191.

¹⁵ Herodotus 7.129. For other examples of Herodotus' discretion with regard to the gods see 2.46, 121.2; 6.105. On the other hand, he does not mince words when exposing the trick of Pisistratus, who avails himself of the support of a peasant girl dressed up as Athene. A fraud that was common knowledge could be mentioned without giving offense to the goddess: 1.60.

¹⁶ Herodotus 2.3.2.

¹⁷ The other occasion is 2.23; cf. A.E. Wardman "Myth in Greek Historiography" *Historia* 9 (1960) 403-13, here 403f.

wise course of action: on the one hand, sacrifices as they are due to an immortal god; on the other, funerary honours as befitting a hero. Now the Greeks tell a *mythos* about Hercules, which is really naive. They say that he went from Greece to Egypt and that the Egyptians were about to sacrifice him to their gods when suddenly he showed his strength and killed them all - as if the Egyptians had ever used human sacrifices and as if one man could kill a whole crowd. At this point Herodotus thought that he had given enough rein to his rational bent and that it was time for a pious invocation: "What has been said here on this subject, may it be kindly received by both gods and heroes."¹⁸

On another occasion Herodotus was even more categorical: "I am committed to telling it as it has been told, but I am not by any means committed to believing it, and this holds true of my entire work."¹⁹ His basic attitude thus parallels that of Hesiod sheltering behind the Muses, who know, but won't tell, when they are uttering the truth and when poetic lies. In practice — and here lies the novelty — Herodotus sees no reason to exercise such discretion, especially if the issue under consideration does not concern religion. In human affairs, when rational doubts occur to him, he may say so bluntly, if he sees fit.²⁰ He will not do it systematically, though, for, indeed, he can believe what he wants and is under no obligation to tell us.

There is a remarkable case where Herodotus distinguished sharply and at length between the historical facts, as he saw them, and the fiction told by a bard of the mythical age, actually Homer. In Memphis he finds a sanctuary dedicated to Aphrodite the Stranger and infers that it was built in honour of the famous Helen, who actually was in Egypt when the Greeks commonly assumed her to be in Troy. The priests tell him how Paris, having carried Helen off from Sparta, was driven to Egypt by adverse weather and obliged to leave her behind when he set sail again for Troy. The Trojans did not lie when they told the besieging Greeks that they did not have her. For, had she been there, they would surely have surrendered her rather than incur countless sufferings and ultimate destruction. "Indeed it seems to me that Homer also knew this account, but since it was not so well suited to his epic as the version that he actually used, he chose to discard it,

¹⁸ Herodotus 2.45.

¹⁹ Herodotus 7.152.

²⁰ Examples abound; see e.g. 1.75, 2.129-131, and for a famous case of misplaced rational doubt, 4.42.

not without indicating his knowledge, however.”²¹ Herodotus realised that his challenge to the commonly held view required solid support. As proof of Homer’s acquaintance of the true circumstances he quoted specific verses from the *Iliad* (6.289-92) and the *Odyssey* (4.227-30, 351-2). To end his account, Herodotus emphasized once again that in siding with the Egyptian priests against Homer’s version of the events he had merely stated his personal opinion (*te emoi dokei*). With the sure touch of a superior writer he knew that Helen’s whereabouts were intriguing enough to justify his extensive treatment of the issue, but his purpose was at no time to criticize Homer. That he believed he was right did not mean that Homer was wrong. Opinion (*doxa*) stood against opinion; opinions was all that the investigation of the past could yield.²² Homer, another superior writer, knew best what suited his epic tale. While clearly fictional, his version was appropriate to his purpose. Herodotus first mentioned the rape of Helen right at the beginning of his history. Even then he avoided saying that she was taken to Troy.²³ What mattered was the rape itself, for it was a link in that chain of irritants between the Greek and barbarian hemispheres that would eventually lead to the Persian Wars. A great historical event, the Persian Wars, could be traced back to a chain of causes that lay all in the domain of myth. Herodotus could not know how often modern historians would confirm his realization that men were guided by myths when they initiated actions of historical significance. What he knew very well, though, was that — notwithstanding the barriers between gods and humans and the time frame assigned to either race — myth and history could and did interact.

It is a measure of Herodotus’ greatness that he did not treat the problem of Helen’s whereabouts as a general model for *Quellenkritik*. It is not correct to claim, as Collingwood did, that his purpose was to extract *epistēmē* (certain knowledge) from various *doxai* (opinions).²⁴ If that had been all he wanted, there would have been no *Histories*, for the majority of the tales he reported did not lend themselves to rational critique. To the Greek mind the essence of history was not inquiry (*historia*), it was story-telling. The historian’s art was linked to rhetorical training and dramatic performance. The public had a

²¹ Herodotus 2. 112-20, here 116; cf. Ligota “This Story is not True...” cit. 9-11.

²² Cf. Ligota, “This Story is not True ...” cit. 9.

²³ Herodotus 1.3-4.

²⁴ Collingwood, *The Idea of History* cit. 25, 28.

right to expect entertainment and Herodotus respected this right. His tale, as we have seen, called for frequent digressions and he responded to the call with some enthusiasm. The Greek myths did not only offer a steady supply of material to tragedians, they were equally well suited to provide digressions in historical accounts. After Herodotus, Theopompus (born c. 378 B.C.) seems to have been particularly intent on offering mythical digressions.²⁵ Also in the fourth century a historiographical tradition developed that relied on dramatization to kindle the emotions of readers. It began with Duris and Phylarchus and was subsequently carried to Rome.²⁶

On the other hand, Herodotus often came under attack for his mythological digressions. The father of history became the father of historical untruth. Wardman quotes the succinct jab of a later theorist: "Herodotus constantly conceals the truth with *mythoi*; he is a sceptic and an entertainer."²⁷ Thucydides, who was barely a generation younger than Herodotus, contrasted his work from that of preceding authors concerned with the past (*logographoi*) in terms of *to mythōdes*, the telling of myths and all sorts of stories. They had practised *mythodes*, but he wouldn't, and to the public his work would appear less agreeable as a result.²⁸ It is quite possible that the *logographos* foremost in his mind was Herodotus. As Thucydides saw it, the *logographoi* thus were serving up to people who, in Wiseman's words, "accept stories about their country's past *abasanistōs* - not just 'without enquiry,' but without the torture that was used in the ancient world to extract evidence from slaves."²⁹

This then was how Thucydides saw the arduous task to which he had committed himself. Under torture the truth had to be extracted from such recalcitrant witnesses as were the convoluted experiences of one's own life-time and the fabulous records of the distant past. Once secured, however, historical truth remained valid for all time to come; it became a *ktēma es aiei*, "a possession for ever."³⁰ It would

²⁵ Wardman, "Myth in Greek Historiography" cit. 406.

²⁶ F.W. Walbank, "History and Tragedy" *Historia* 9 (1960) 216-34. Wiseman, *Clio's Cosmetics* cit. 30f. Fornara, *The Nature of History* cit. 124-34.

²⁷ Wardman, "Myth in Greek Historiography" cit. 405, quoting Romanus Sophista. For other critics see also Walbank, "History and Tragedy" 232 and Cicero, *De legibus* 1.2.5.

²⁸ Thucydides 1.21.1, 22.4.

²⁹ Wiseman, *Clio's Cosmetics* cit. 41. Thucydides 1.20.1.

³⁰ "For as many as shall wish to see the verified portion of what has happened and will — such is human nature — happen again in the same or a very similar fashion — for those to think that my work is useful will be quite enough [for me]. It is composed as a possession for ever

retain validity for as long as men remained men, for human nature did not change.³¹ Thus, at the very beginning of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides could claim that that conflict would prove greater and worthier of consideration than either the Trojan or the Persian Wars, the two determinant events in Greece's past.³² The extreme standards of accuracy required to make history a *klēma es aiei* could be applied by Thucydides to the Peloponnesian War because he chanced to be a contemporary, often indeed an eye-witness, of the events to be examined. For events farther back in the past, despite the most pressing inquiries a similar degree of certainty was unobtainable.

Now if only contemporary developments can be so analysed as to yield timeless truth, one may be tempted to seek a truth that is of the philosophical rather than the historical order. As a philosopher of history Thucydides could assess the human condition in the abstract, while as a historian he disqualified himself from adequately recording the concrete actions of men in the past. In fact he was invalidating his own claim that the Peloponnesian War was incomparably greater than the conflicts of the past since by his own admission that past could not be reliably ascertained. The question thus arises why, nevertheless, he began his contemporary history with a summary of past developments reaching back all the way to the mythical beginnings of Greek civilization. The answer, I think, has to be that Thucydides was fully aware of the ordeal of endurance he intended to inflict on his readers. Even modern readers will not take easily to the long-winded account, replete with minutiae, complexities and a multitude of sites, which the conscientious investigator had extracted from his sources under torture. That account then would be harder still on Thucydides' Greek contemporaries. He certainly understood how much his own notion of historical inquiry differed from their predominant expectation of things past as a source of entertainment. At the same time it must have been crucial to him that his readers accept his contention that the

rather than an entry in a competition for broadcasting at the present moment" (1.22.4).

Thucydides here expresses his faith in the lessons of the past — a faith that comes with the confidence that history will repeat itself, more or less. He offers a foretaste of an equally famous line from another introduction. Jacob Burckhardt put it that way: "Thus the maxim *historia vitae magistra* takes on a higher and at the same time a humbler meaning. We wish to draw on experience, not to be clever (for another time), but wise (for ever)." (Jacob Burckhardt, *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen*, Introduction. (The work was published posthumously in 1905).

³¹ Thucydides, 3.82.2.

³² Thucydides, 1.1.1, 21.1, 23.1.

Peloponnesian War would yield incomparable and rare enlightenment, that it was in fact the greatest event in the life of Greece. Here was the key to a *ktēma es aiei*, and all that happened before was leading up to it, was the prehistory of that great conflict. Indeed, all had to be included because in the final outcome all was tainted with the same uncertainty. Even the Persian Wars, despite Herodotus' efforts, offered no convincing starting point for a truly historical treatment. This is, I think, why at the outset of eight long books dealing with the first twenty years of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides has given us his sparkling abstract of the entire Hellenic past on just a handful of pages. Using what today would be termed archaeology, anthropology and sociology of culture, he developed a coherent thesis as to how navigation led the Greeks from tribalism to collective action, commerce, wealth, colonial expansion and finally universal conflict.

Greek commentators subsequently recognized Thucydides' persistent refusal to become entrapped with story-telling in the fashion of the *logographoi*. In all of his work they found one *mythos*, and even that one could be justified as being "necessary" to the argument.³³ The myth in question is the tale of the Thracian chief Tereus, who married Procne, daughter of King Pandion of Athens, and then raped her sister Philomela. He cut out Philomela's tongue to prevent the sisters from communicating. But Procne found out and took gruesome revenge. She killed her only son, Itys, and served his meat to her husband at meal time. Finally the two sisters were transformed, Procne into the swallow, Philomela into the nightingale. The story is indeed the perfect model of the kind of mythical digression that Thucydides normally tried to avoid. In fact he did not so much tell it as merely allude to it when pointing out that Tereus should not be confused with Teres, king of the Thracian Odrysae tribe.³⁴ Because of the importance of his son and successor, Sitalces, Teres had a very legitimate place in Thucydides' narrative of Athen's imperialist enterprises. Thucydides himself had commanded the Athenian fleet in Thracian waters. Although he thus had good reason for mentioning Tereus, he declined the opportunity for telling a tall tale.

³³ Wardman, "Myth in Greek Historiography" cit. 405; Walbank, "History and Tragedy" cit. 221; Wiseman, *Clio's Cosmetics* 144f. Of course, it is possible to find other myths and legends. Wardman draws attention to Thucydides 2.102.5; see also below for the tale of Harmodius and Aristogiton.

³⁴ Thucydides 2.29.

A modern Thucydides would probably not have thought that it was necessary to mention Tereus in order to prevent a confusion with Teres. One, after all, is a mythical character existing only in mythical time, whereas the other is historical and datable with reasonable precision; his son, Sitalces, died in 424 B.C. To the real Thucydides, however, such an explicit distinction did not impose itself. Mythical and historical times were still overlapping. Hellen, the mythical son of Deucalion, yielded a chronological benchmark; he pinpointed the historical moment when the disparate tribes inhabiting Greece first developed a common identity as Hellenes. But other personages of myth, such as Perseus, Pelops and Atreus, also retain their place in history as founders of their respective dynasties; Agamemnon and Achilles lend concreteness to the Trojan War. In Agamemnon's case Thucydides thought that one could extract the substance of his role in history from the Homeric tales. The power of his navy spread fear among the other Greeks and forced them into common action under his leadership.³⁵ Before the time of Agamemnon, Minos retained the rank assigned to him by Herodotus as the mythical first founder of naval power, at least as far as "can be gathered from what we hear."³⁶

Even the recent past could be affected by the aura of uncertainty emanating from the early mythical sources. Thucydides knew that his contemporaries had no taste for diligent scrutiny of the evidence. People do not stop to think. The Athenians know that as a tyrant Pisistratus would be succeeded by his eldest son. But they still assume that it was Hipparchus, and not his elder brother Hippias, who became the next tyrant, simply because Hipparchus is notorious and Hippias is not.³⁷ What has rendered Hipparchus notorious was his death at the hands of Harmodius and Aristogiton in the wake of an amorous intrigue. Aristogiton is a respected citizen and the lover of Harmodius, a youth of noted beauty. Hipparchus also woos the young man, but finds himself rejected. Seeking revenge, he engineers a public slight for Harmodius' sister and thus brings the wrath of the two lovers upon himself. In the event both Hipparchus and the conspirators are killed, but the tyranny of Hippias survives. Much of this story may be legendary, even mythical.³⁸ One might expect Thucydides to doubt as

³⁵ Thucydides 1.3.1-3, 9.1-4.

³⁶ Thucydides 1.4.1; cf above p. 23.

³⁷ Thucydides 1.20, 6.54-59.

³⁸ See Francis Macdonald Cornford, *Thucydides Mythistoricus* (London 1907) 132f.

much, but if he did, he certainly did not say so. However that may be, the detailed account he gives of it is certainly entertaining. Yet, detail is justified here, for the incident led, in Thucydides' view, to a decisive turn in the nature of the Athenian tyranny. Hitherto Hippias' rule had been remarkably enlightened and correspondingly popular; henceforward it became sinister and oppressive. If some features of this story are indeed mythical, as they may very well be, Thucydides succeeded in embedding the myth solidly in his thesis about the decline and fall of the Athenian tyranny. That thesis, with all the romantic trimmings of the tale, was still repeated in a standard textbook of the 1970s.³⁹

Thucydides was a historian; like every historian he was not immune against the lures of *fabula*, and like every good historian he was himself a potential myth-maker. What is new and exciting is the function he assigned to *fabula* in his analysis of the past. Rather than simply entertain the reader, he used *fabula* purposefully in his unrelenting endeavour to unravel historical truth. The way he approached ancient myths and managed to extract from them plausible conclusions about the evolution of early Greek society has sometimes earned him a reputation for near-modernity.⁴⁰ On the other hand, what has to be the principal function of *fabula* in his work is a practice entirely inadmissible by the standards of modern historical scholarship. Thucydides' outstanding contribution to *fabula*'s arsenal is his reasoned use of formal speeches put into the mouth of historical figures.⁴¹ It is true that Herodotus had used direct speech freely and spontaneously for dramatic effect and the gratification of his readers. Thucydides continued to use it, and use it on a grand scale, but not as a concession to readers looking for lively entertainment. Rather the spoken word must supplement the verified deed; factual account and reported speech were both indispensable in the meaningful recording

³⁹ J.B. Bury and Russell Meiggs, *A History of Greece to the Death of Alexander the Great*, fourth ed. (London 1975) 134f.

⁴⁰ Kurt von Fritz, "Aristotle's Contribution to the Practice and Theory of Historiography" *University of California Publications in Philosophy* 28,3 (1958) 113-38, esp. 116f. It has been debated whether early impulses towards a rational use of myths can be found in the fragments of Hecataeus (see above n. 12). On balance it may be said that Hecataeus, like Herodotus after him, was not so much evaluating myths as incorporating them in his historical narrative.

⁴¹ For the following see Fornara, *The Nature of History* cit. 142-68.; Wiseman, *Clio's Cosmetics* cit., 28f.; F.W. Walbank, *Speeches in Greek Historians* (Oxford 1965). Collingwood, *The Idea of History* cit., 30f.

of the past. Each of them, moreover, had to be handled in accordance with its own methodology designed to minimize the potential for error, distortion and false interpretation. Actions ought to be reported from personal observation or, failing this, from painstaking interrogation of those present in the event. Chance information had to be discarded outright, and even valid testimony had to be tested for possible bias and lapse of memory.⁴² Speeches, on the other hand, presented an even more serious problem:

And as for what this or that person said by word of mouth, either in preparation of the war or as participant therein, it was difficult to remember the exact words, both for myself when I had heard them in person and for others who reported them to me from another location. I therefore put it down such as I believe each person ought to have expressed it best, every time in keeping with the specific situation.[I did so, moreover], adhering as closely as possible to the overall intent of what was actually said.⁴³

In the first place Thucydides had to feel confident that he could accurately establish the overall intent of a speech to be reported. Next he had to devise the formulations that best served the point the speaker wished to make, and finally he had to be sure to use his memory of what was actually said whenever it would serve him. It may be helpful to state right away that Thucydides' method corresponds step by step to the procedure followed by an exemplary history painter of, let us say, the early nineteenth century, who wished to record a specific battle scene. Like the Greek historian, the modern painter had first to gain a general understanding of the historical action. He then had to invent a visual rendering of that action, which could be fitted into the available frame of pictorial space. As a third step, using collective memory in the place of Thucydides' individual one, the painter had to incorporate into his work historically accurate detail wherever such was on record. The banners and ensigns, the artillery pieces, the uniforms and the facial features of commanding generals presented so many challenging opportunities to picture reality with painstaking precision. There were even more details, however — the faces of the soldiers, the colour and build of the horses, the clouds in the sky, and

⁴² Thucydides, 1.22.2-3.

⁴³ Thucydides, 1.22.1.

so on — where no records existed. In all of these step three could not be completed and imagination, rather than memory, had the last word.

The comparison will indicate, I hope, why Thucydides, unlike a modern historian, believed he could not do without the formal speeches. He knew that his rendering of them could not reach the standard of accuracy he had set himself, but like our painter, he could not leave blank spots in his picture whenever an authentic record was not at hand. To the Greeks history was a narrative of events. To practise detached analysis to the extent that this is done by modern historians would have offended their sense of style. Modern analysis must and can live with blanks; one can adequately explain the battle of Waterloo without undue recourse to fancy, although one cannot paint it without a huge imput of sheer invention. Thucydides needed the speeches; omitting them would have left unacceptable blanks in his comprehensive narrative of the war. He needed them in order to supply the intentions and expectations behind memorable actions. Thucydides' methodological chapter was based on the premise that integral history was formed of two constituents, namely words and deeds. In terms of our investigation this means that one of the two constituents of Thucydides' integral history, namely speech, fell within the confines of *fabula*. The point is of great importance; Thucydides' concept of integral history remained valid for the entire Graeco-Roman world, although few subsequent historians were as scrupulous as he was in ascertaining a foundation of historical truth for their invented speeches.

Writing in the second century B.C., Polybius not only reiterated Thucydides' points about the function and authentication of formal speeches.⁴⁴ He also inserted a great many of them in his narrative and took pains to render them as truthfully as he could. His zeal for authenticity was helped by the fact that his *Histories* reached back just two generations prior to his own, thus keeping within the limits of the *spatium historicum* as first defined by Herodotus. The earliest formal speeches to be found in his work date from the time of Hannibal's appearance in northern Italy — less than two decades before Polybius' birth.⁴⁵ He took the line that the earlier past had been covered — inadequately, no doubt, but what else did circumstances permit? — by preceding historians such as Aratus of Sicyon and Timaeus of

⁴⁴ Polybius, 12.25a.3, 25b.1.

⁴⁵ Polybius, 3.63.1-13, 64.1-9. Earlier passages rendered in direct speech are confined to single sentences; see 1.79.12, 2.8.10-11.

Tauromenium.⁴⁶ In fact he did not conceal his contempt for Timaeus, whose speeches reminded him of exercises such as might be assigned to students of rhetoric.⁴⁷

Whatever balance between *historia* and *fabula* had been struck by the Thucydidean use of speeches was inevitably upset when the speakers belonged to a distant past that had left no reliable records. Yet Thucydides himself may have encouraged the transfer of his speech technique from contemporary history to earlier times. Human nature, he insisted, did not change.⁴⁸ Historians such as Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Diodorus Siculus, who shared his conviction, assumed that they possessed the intuition to set down how men of the past ought to have told it, even though they could not know what had actually been said.⁴⁹ Above all, what tipped the balance in favour of *fabula* was the switch from Thucydides' account of one contemporary conflict to histories of the entire ancient world under Roman domination. In this wide framework the use of invented speeches was a matter of cosmetics (to borrow Wiseman's term) rather than substance, and the frequency with which Roman historians resorted to such make-up — Tacitus belonged to a school that showed restraint, Livy to one that did not⁵⁰ — need not detain us. The practice later flourished in the age of Renaissance; Lorenzo Valla praised it, not indeed as a source of pure truth, but as a means of instruction and enlightenment.⁵¹

The use of invented speech represents one part of the legacy of Herodotus and Thucydides that was upheld with little modification; other parts of that legacy, however, were subjected to drastic change. Earlier in this chapter we suggested that Herodotus recognized, and sometimes expressed, a qualitative difference between indefinite mythical time and datable human time. Although men could mingle with mythical heroes and even gods, men did belong to a different

⁴⁶ Polybius, 1.3.1-3, 5.1; cf. Polybius' principal statement on his approach to historiography, 9.1.1-2.7.

⁴⁷ Polybius, 12.25a.4-5, 25k.1, 26c.1. For his strictures against the free invention of speeches, cf. 3.20.1-5.

⁴⁸ Cf. above n. 31, also Thucydides 1.21.2: Men always think that the wars of their own time are the greatest.

⁴⁹ Wiseman, *Clio's Cosmetics* cit., 29, 51f.

⁵⁰ Fornara, *The Nature of History* cit., 147-52, 160f.

⁵¹ Lorenzo Valla, *Historiae regis Ferdinandi Aragoniae*, preface, in *Opera omnia* (Turin 1962) II 6.

aeon. This sophisticated two-dimensional time frame did not sit well with subsequent Greek historians, many of whom worked hard to establish a rational chronology. To be rational, it had to be one-dimensional, in fact linear, so as to render events datable, permit periodization, and forge genealogies and other lines of continuity from the remotest past to the present. It is possible that even before Herodotus' time Hecataeus was moving in this direction.⁵² From the late fourth century fragments of a universal history by Ephorus of Cyme survive. These suggest that the notion of a benchmark, a specific point in time when mythology ended and pragmatic historiography began was then widely accepted. Hecataeus himself was hardly breaking new ground when he presented a specific occurrence, and even a date, to mark the turning point between myth and history. Ephorus' benchmark was the return of Hercules' offspring to the Peloponnesus, where their ancestor had once held sway. Traditionally this was the way of referring to the arrival of the Dorians in the peninsula, c. 1070 B.C. For Ephorus to begin his universal history with this event was logical; it seems that Hellanicus of Lesbos had previously used it as the closing point for his mythological writings.⁵³

The notion of a fixed turning point remained although the event itself might change. To M. Terentius Varro, in the first century B.C., it was the first Olympiad and beginning of Olympiad dating [776 B.C.], which fell close to his date for the foundation of Rome [753 B.C.].⁵⁴ Marking the transition from myth to history with a specific date was, of course, a mistake. Herodotus and Thucydides had done well to avoid it. Far from detaching myth from history, as it might seem to do at first glance, it actually coupled them; and the coupling compelled them, like railway cars, to stay together on the same track. The track was the chronological progression of universal history. The consequences were unfortunate. Although since Thucydides, at the

⁵² See above n. 12.

⁵³ For Ephorus see F. Gr. Hist., ed. Jacoby cit. 70, T. 8 and 10 (Diodorus Siculus 4.1.2f. and 16.76.5) and commentary p. 25f. Cf. Fornara, *The Nature of History* cit. 8f.; Wardman, "Myth in Greek Historiography" cit., 408f.; Canfora, "L'inizio della storia secondo i Greci" cit.; Guido Schepens, "Historiographical Problems in Ephorus" in *Historiographia antiqua. Commentationes Lovanienses in honorem W. Peremans septuagenarii editae* (Louvain 1977) 95-118, esp. 106-8.

⁵⁴ Fornara, *The Nature of History* cit. 9. *Paulys Realencyklopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, new ed. by Georg Wissowa et al. (Stuttgart 1893-1978) Supplement VI 1237-39.

latest, it was recognized that myths would not respond to the same methodological treatment as history, the mythical times were confirmed as an integral part in the universal span of history and had to be included in its treatment. Any difference that Ephorus and even Diodorus seemed to recognize was basically quantitative: history required detail; mythistory did not deserve it.⁵⁵ Typically, for Diodorus and other historians dealing with the Roman empire in its universal outreach, even the precept of succinctness in the treatment of myths could not be sustained for long. The deeds of Hercules demanded a full account because "they had accorded him immortality in the unanimous judgement of our ancestors."⁵⁶

The mesh of myth and history continued to defy half-hearted attempts at disentanglement. There was no sequel to Thucydides' brief but ingenious demonstration as to how valid socio-historical data could be extracted from myths. For those uncomfortable with his harsh discipline an easier way was opening up. Rather than torture the evidence for elusive nuggets of truth, one could approach the traditional tales with Circe's magic wand. Imagination sufficed to transform myth into solid history, or so it seemed. As we turn to the Greek experiments with demythologization, it may be helpful to mention first Xenophanes of Colophon (d. after 478 B.C.). Xenophanes made short shrift of the familiar clan of anthropomorphic gods assembled on Mount Olympus. There was not a single human vice that mortals, beginning with Homer and Hesiod, had not imputed to the gods. The Ethiopians fancied their gods flat-nosed and black, the Thracians theirs blue-eyed and with red hair. If oxen, horses and lions could paint or sculpt, they would fashion gods in the shape of oxen, horses and lions. There was "One God, among gods and men, the greatest, in body as well as mind quite unlike mortals."⁵⁷ No other Greek perhaps came so close to saying that the one true God apart, all other gods were human fantasies. Xenophanes' propositions were philosophical and not in themselves relevant to the task of historians. But they were certainly radical and presented an extreme

⁵⁵ Ephorus, F.Gr. Hist., ed. Jacoby cit. 70 F. 9: cf. Fornara, *The Nature of History* cit. 9. Diodorus Siculus 1.6.1f.

⁵⁶ Diodorus Siculus, 4.8.5.

⁵⁷ *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, ed. Hermann Diels, 6th ed. (Berlin 1951) I 113-39, F.23 (here quoted), also F. 11-16. *Der kleine Pauly*, ed. Konrat Ziegler et al. (Stuttgart 1964-75) V 1419-21. For typical expressions of scorn for man-fashioned gods see also Plato, *Euthyphro* 6a-c; Cicero, *De natura deorum* 2.28.70.

option among the many ways in which sophisticated Greeks could approach their protean religion. Some further modifications did make them applicable to the problems of myth and history in a form that came later to be known as Euhemerism. A typical Euhemerist would not claim that the gods had never existed and did not exist now, but that they had existed in the remote past as human beings. That they had indeed existed at one time was shown by the unanimous testimony of all available sources. People, it was assumed, will not go on talking about that which is not. Nor can they experience that which is physically impossible. Therefore the myths must be explained in a rational fashion; they must be cleansed of their supernatural elements.

What we call Euhemerism was practiced in varying degrees by most Greek historians and commentators of the old epics. For instance, the scholiasts pondered over Homer's description of the chariot of the Achilles. It is drawn by three horses, two of which are immortal creatures, whereas the third is not and gets killed in the battle. The pseudo-realistic explanation offered was that two horses were stallions, capable of procreation and in that sense immortal, whereas the third was a gelding.⁵⁸ Even historians of lasting influence, a Thucydides, a Polybius, a Strabo, found rational explanations for supernatural events and posited human actors in the place of heros and gods. No wonder that Euhemerism endured; we shall find it alive and well in the middle of the nineteenth century.⁵⁹

Whether Euhemerus of Messene (fl. 311-298 B.C.) himself was a Euhemerist is questionable. His *Hiera anagraphē* or *Historia sacra*, as Quintus Ennius (239-169 B.C.) titled his Latin translation, was a fable written perhaps with the intent to popularize the cult of contemporary rulers. The tale describes the mysterious island of Panchaea with its principal temple dedicated to Zeus and established by Zeus himself, "when he was still (*eti*) living among men." Engraved on a golden stele are the deeds of Panchaea's first kings, Uranus, Cronus and Zeus — deeds that would serve to lay down the fundamental laws of all mankind.⁶⁰ Euhemerus treated the Olympian gods according to the well-established model of the hero Hercules,

⁵⁸ Homer, *Iliad* 16.145-54, 464-75. George Grote, "Grecian Legends and Early History" in *The Minor Works*, ed. Alexander Bain (London 1873) 106f.

⁵⁹ See below p. 369.

⁶⁰ F. Gr. Hist., ed. Jacoby cit. 63, esp. F. 2 (Diodorus 6.1-10) and commentary p. 562. *Der kleine Pauly*, ed. Ziegler cit. II 414. Paul Veyne *Did the Greeks Believe in their Myths?*, tr. P. Wissing (Chicago 1988) 140f.

who had been raised to divine rank on account of his philanthropic labours. The Olympians entered the plane of history as human actors but they did so without leaving the timeless sphere of divinity. This was enough to earn Euhemerus a reputation of impiety among the Greeks and a hearty welcome among the Christian Fathers beginning with Lactantius. But he had not really relegated the gods to human status and purified their tales of all supernatural features, as Euhemerists were supposed to do. While the rationalist tendency of Euhemerism can be found both before and after Euhemerus, not a single Greek or Roman writer may have pursued it fully to its logical end. None seems to have proposed that any of the major gods, who were the object of a widespread cult, should be seen purely as a human being.

This rule holds true of a slight collection of fifty-two irreverent pieces (*Apista*), whose sole concern otherwise appears to be to purge every last remnant of marvellous traits. The collection is attributed to one Palaephatus; its original form, which is no longer traceable, must be dated from about the period of Euhemerus. Like the latter, Palaephatus was relished by the Fathers of the church; he remained popular in the schools of Byzantium and even received renewed attention in the eighteenth century, when it became a fashionable pursuit to analyze the myths of both classical and Jewish Antiquity. As far as the immortals were concerned, Palaephatus prudently kept his distance, but he gave no quarter, when he attacked the monstrous mythology of the heroic age. One of his principal targets was the rich zoo of creatures that were part beast and part human. The girl Mestra, for instance, could not possibly have transformed herself into various animals. Rather the poverty of her father Erysichthon forced her into prostitution at a time when prostitutes still received sheep and cows for their wages; hence people would say that Mestra had been transformed into such animals.⁶¹ Centaurs could never have existed for the convincing reason that horses and humans did not eat the same food. Far from being courted by mighty Jove concealed in the guise of a bull, Europa was raped by an otherwise unknown man, whose name must have been 'Bull'. Another myth had it that Pasiphae, the wife of King Minos, became infatuated with a bull (*tauros*) of extraordinary beauty. So she bade Daedalus construct the bronze hull of a

⁶¹ F. Gr. Hist., ed. Jacoby cit. 44. *Mythographi Graeci* 3.2 *Palaephatus*, ed. N. Festa (Leipzig 1902) 23 (24). Cf. *Der kleine Pauly*, ed. Ziegler cit. IV 416.

cow and slipped inside in order to copulate with her animal lover. In reality Pasiphae associated with a handsome youth named Tauros and the fruit of their illicit union was a bastard son appropriately called Minotaurus. In this case Palaephatus' explanation was hardly original. Daedalus' presence could be explained by making his house the place where the lovers met, while the cow was the figure he was busy sculptoring. Or it was inside the wooden cow that the lovers secretly embraced. In the early third century B.C. Philochoros knew that Tauros really was Minos' general, and Plutarch proceeded later on the same assumption.⁶² As Palaephatus plodded on, his rationalisations sometimes were more complicated than the myths they were supposed to explain. He never pretended that his random collection was a work of historiography, but as the example of Diodorus and Plutarch shows, he developed a technique to which even serious historians would occasionally resort. It should be emphasized again that the heroes and monsters subjected to this kind of rationalist laundering were not gods, although immortal gods figured often among their ancestry. Reducing them in Euhemerist fashion to strictly human status offered an enticing excuse for subjecting the heroic age to historical treatment. It also saved the heroes from the annihilation that sceptical philosophers and Christian theologians wrought upon the Olympian gods.

Above all, it should be borne in mind that to the broad masses the question of historical factuality was irrelevant. Whenever people gathered before the rostrum of rhetors and the stage of dramatic actors, whenever they thronged to public buildings decorated with figurative art work, they could see with their own eyes, and hear with their own ears, that the myths were alive and well. Isocrates (436-338 B.C.), the great teacher of rhetoric, missed no opportunity to remind his fellow-Athenians of the glorious military exploits that, said he, qualified them to preeminence and leadership among the Greeks. Athens it was that had regularly saved them from the onslaught of mighty barbarians such as the Thracians led by Eumolpus, a son of Poseidon, the Scythians and their neighbours, the Amazons, daughters of Ares, the Trojans and more recently the Persians.⁶³ There was no reason to doubt the ancient deeds any more than the recent ones; the

⁶² Palaephatus, ed. Festa cit. 1, 2, 15 (16). Plutarch, *Theseus* 19.2. For the other references see *Paulys Realencyclopädie*, ed. Wissowa cit. XVIII-4. 2075f.

⁶³ Isocrates, *Panegyricus* 54, 66-72; *Panathenaicus* 193-96; *Archidamus* 41-43, *Areopagiticus* 75. Earlier Herodotus (9.27) had put a similar argument into the mouth of the Athenians.

mythoi had been told so often, and every time they had met with credence.⁶⁴

The case of the Amazons is of particular interest in that here for the first time we enter the zone of conflict between historical truth and political conviction. Throughout the periods covered in this study, the fostering of political opinion will remain a prime motor for *fabula's* intrusions into the realm of *historia*. The Amazons, a fanciful race of unweaned women warriors, have intrigued generation after generation in Western society, right down to the current vogue of feminist interpretations.⁶⁵ The myth appears to have been known throughout Greece as early as the seventh century B.C.⁶⁶ It became popular in Attica, and quite particularly in Athens, where it was nurtured through consecutive stages in the development of political ideology. On Attic pottery from the second quarter of the sixth century onwards, one or more Amazons are shown locked in combat with Hercules, and soon also with other heroes.⁶⁷ To show the changing roles of the Amazons in Athenian propaganda, W. B. Tyrrell has gathered evidence from vases and surviving reliefs of the Athenian Treasury at Delphi (c. 510 B.C.) and the Parthenon on Athens' Acropolis (447-38 B.C.), and also from texts, such as the descriptions of the Temple of Apollo Daphnephorus in Eretria (c.510 B.C.), the Theseum (c.475 B.C.) and the Stoa Poikile (c.460 B.C.), both in Athens. Whatever the context: from the tyranny of Pisistratus to the liberation by the Alcmaeonidae and the victories of Cimon, Themistocles and Pericles, Amazons, singly or collectively, raped or defeated in battle, were presented as a foil for the glory of the Athenians and their leaders.⁶⁸

As long as the Amazons were primarily creatures of Athenian patriotic sentiment it is understandable that the question of their historicity did not matter. No significance can be derived from the fact that the paintings in the Stoa Poikile along with the prose of

⁶⁴ Isocrates, *Panegyricus* 30; *Ad Demonicum* 50.

⁶⁵ Abby Wettan Kleinbaum, *The War against the Amazons* (New York 1983).

⁶⁶ Dietrich von Bothmer, *Amazons in Greek Art* (Oxford 1957) 1-5.

⁶⁷ William Blake Tyrrell, *Amazons. A Study in Athenian Mythmaking* (Baltimore 1984) 2f.

⁶⁸ Tyrrell, *Amazons* cit. 3-21; Eberhard Thomas, *Mythos und Geschichte. Untersuchungen zum historischen Gehalt griechischer Mythendarstellungen* (Cologne 1976). In contrast to their prominence in visual art and speeches, it seems that Amazons appeared infrequently in dramatic performances on the stage. Fragments show that in the fourth century Cephisodorus and Epicrates had written comedies entitled 'The Amazons;' see *The Fragments of Attic Comedy* ed. John Maxwell Edmonds (Leiden 1957-61) I 920f., II 348f.

Herodotus and Isocrates presented them in sequence with historical invaders of Attica, whereas the battles shown on the Parthenon metopes were all mythical. The Parthenon was a temple, and myths were in keeping with the aura of religion; the political message conveyed was, none the less, loud and clear. But why, one may ask, did scepticism still not win the upper hand, when Athens' political and religious dynamic had faded? To be sure, Palaephatus could be counted on to be incredulous; but who cared? He declared that an army of women was improbable in the past, since none was to be found in the present. The Amazons, he suggested, might have been male warriors, who shaved and covered their thighs with skirts.⁶⁹ If atomists and Euhemerists invoked the physical laws of nature to deny the existence of centaurs and all cross-breeding between man and beast, would these same laws of nature not also prevent women from functioning as men? This is precisely the question Strabo asked about the Amazons in a digression of his *Geography*, written perhaps about 7 B.C.

Who could believe that an army or a city or a tribe of women could be organized without men, and not only be organized but even attack a foreign country, and not only subdue its neighbours as far as present-day Ionia, but even launch an expedition across the sea as far as Attica? For this is tantamount to saying that the men of that day were women and the women men.

The attack on Attica had occurred in mythical times and was reported in *mythoi*, which Strabo termed "deceitful and monstrous" in contrast to "history, which aims at the truth." So, Strabo seems to be saying, a rational person might consign the Amazons to the realm of fairy tales. Amazingly, however, "concerning the Amazons, the same things are said now as in ancient times, things that are monstrous and beyond belief." The Amazons were, indeed, a special case. The fact that the old stories were still repeated "increases their peculiarity and our trust in the old accounts in preference to the modern ones."⁷⁰ Other passages confirm that Strabo tended to believe that the Amazons were historical but had disappeared by the time of Alexander the Great.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Palaephatus, ed. Festa cit. 32 (33).

⁷⁰ Strabo 11.5.3.

⁷¹ Strabo 11.5.4-5, 12.3.21, 8.6.

Strabo shuffled, but in the end he was not prepared to write off the Amazons, at any rate not those of the olden days. For the common run of his contemporaries the Amazon tales did not need to be pondered so critically; they simply were to be enjoyed, for they got better and better. In the late fifth century Hellanicus of Lesbos knew that the Amazons facilitated their handling of weapons by removing the right breast⁷² — a point that was soon commonplace. Some decades later Lysias, another promoter of Athenian self-esteem, invented a rational explanation for the changing fortunes of Amazon warfare. In doing so, he was perhaps inspired by Thucydides' analysis of early myths. Initially, Lysias argued, the warrior women were able to defeat and subjugate all their neighbours, because they were the only ones to possess horses and iron weapons. Against the brave Athenians, however, such material advantages were of no avail. Formerly the Amazons' female bodies had been ruled by a manly spirit, but now their spirit resembled their bodies and the Athenians destroyed them.⁷³

In the long run it was indeed the female bodies, not the manly spirit, that kept curiosity about the Amazons on the boil. To Athenian patriotic propaganda in the fifth century their prowess in battle had been of prime concern. By contrast, subsequent generations down to the present - until recently for the most part the male constituent of those generations - were at least as interested in the love life of the Amazons. Actually, right from the beginning, romance had infiltrated the gory battle-field. Arctinus of Miletus composed the *Aethiopis*, an epic about the Trojan War that may be as old as Homer's. Arctinus' *Aethiopis* is lost but was still available to Proclus in the fifth century A.D., who summarized the action in a nutshell. "The Amazon Penthesilea, a daughter of Ares and a Thracian by race, comes to help the Trojans. After showing great prowess, she is killed by Achilles and buried by the Trojans. Achilles then slays Thersites, who had abused and reproached him for his rumoured love of Penthesilea."⁷⁴ In the fourth century A.D., Quintus Smyrnaeus composed in Greek another epic on the fall of Troy, in which he describes the single combat between Achilles and Penthesilea at great length. The climax, frankly sensual, comes when Penthesilea lies dead on the battle-field.

⁷² F. Gr. Hist., ed. Jacoby cit. 323a F. 16

⁷³ Lysias, *Funeral Oration* 4-6.

⁷⁴ Proclus, *Chrestomathia* 175-80; see *Hesiod, the Homeric Hymns and Homeric* ed. and transl. H.G. Evelyn-White (Loeb, revised ed. 1936) 507.

Then, there as fallen in dust and blood she lay,
 Rose, like the breaking of the dawn, to view
 'Neath dainty-pencilled brows a lovely face,
 Lovely in death. ...
 The warriors gazed, and in their hearts they prayed
 That fair and sweet like her their wives might seem,
 Laid on the bed of love, when home they won.
 Yea, and Achilles' very heart was wrung
 With love's remorse...
 Loud jeered Thersites, mocking to his face:
 "Thou sorry-souled Achilles! art not shamed...
 ... Ha, woman-mad art thou,
 And thy soul lusts for this thing ...
 The beauty and the bed of such as she!"⁷⁵

Romance, however, had no place in the numerous descriptions of the Amazons' mating habits, which range from Herodotus to Strabo.⁷⁶ While the mating itself is variously reported, it is with the birth of children that crucial arrangements for the perpetuation of female sovereignty have to be put in place. Male babies are either sent abroad to live with their fathers, far away from the women-only society, or they are brought up in a state of domestic slavery. Diodorus Siculus, who writes of Amazon tribes in the Pontic region as well as even older ones in Libya, carries the reversal of sex roles to its logical finale. Male children are mutilated at birth; when they grow up, they are made to spin wool and tend the infants, feeding them with milk and porridge.⁷⁷ For the sake of comparison it may be mentioned that a similar reversal of sex roles occurs in the medieval myth of the popess Joan that will be discussed in the next chapter. It resembles the Amazon pattern in the rich orchestration of sexual motifs, and this is hardly surprising. More curiously, the medieval myth also parallels the Greek one in that both initially drew strength from the elaborations of political propagandists.

From the short sketch provided above it will, I hope, be evident how much stimulus the Amazon myth was bound to provide both to historical imagination and historical analysis throughout the ages. It has been examined repeatedly in recent monographs — a fact that may

⁷⁵ Quintus Smyrnaeus, *The Fall of Troy* ed. and transl. A.S. Way (Loeb, London 1913) 1.659-61, 669-71, 722-26, 740 (quoting Way's translation).

⁷⁶ Herodotus 4.111-16. Strabo 11.5.1.

⁷⁷ Diodorus Siculus 2.45.2-3, 3.53.3.

serve to excuse the lack of further treatment in this study. Few other tales perhaps can demonstrate so well the essential capacity of myths to travel and take root in diverse environments. Diodorus Siculus, Strabo and Pausanias show that already in ancient times remnants of Amazon-style societies, composed exclusively of women or at least controlled by them, were found all over the known as well unknown parts of the world. In the Middle Ages the valiant warrior-women will join the itinerant company of Prester John, Gog, Magog and the lost tribes of Israel.⁷⁸ In the Renaissance, Amazons were discovered on the new continent of America and located in the region of the river that was subsequently named for them. But also at home, in the old world, Renaissance society found illustrious women worthy of the name of Amazon.⁷⁹ In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries arguments for and against the existence of Amazons were traded with renewed intensity and sophistication; but only Bachofen's reinterpretation of the old myth, in the middle of the nineteenth century, will elicit some further comment in the pages of this study.⁸⁰

II

Rome

We shall now direct our attention to the history of Rome. As the Roman empire expanded it came within the compass of Greek historiography. The greater part of representative and comprehensive histories of Rome that we possess today was written in Greek by authors such as Polybius, Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Cassius Dio. Indeed, the earliest Roman authors to produce prose accounts of the history of their city, such as Q. Fabius Pictor and L. Cincius Alimentus, also wrote in Greek.⁸¹ A tradition emerged, which traced the progress of Rome, like that of a river, from minute beginnings to the universal sway of her empire, widening the historiographical

⁷⁸ See below p. 131.

⁷⁹ See below pp. 164-66.

⁸⁰ See below p. 360f.

⁸¹ P.G. Walsh, *Livy. His Historical Aims and Methods* (Cambridge 1961) 28f.

catchment area in keeping with the expanding frontiers. This tradition was indebted to Greek historians for two major impulses. In addition to pioneering the writing of history on a world-wide scale, the Greeks had also attempted to capture the mythical origins of cities — a natural urge in a world, where the *polis* was the basic unit of the social fabric and a principal factor in the identification of an individual. It was Livy (59 B.C.-17 A.D.), who combined the two factors and crafted the definitive model of a history of Rome. In particular, Livy quite simply created the early history of Rome — an achievement of unsurpassed importance for the objectives of the present study. Early Rome presents the only case in Western civilization where the trade-off between *fabula* and *historia* remained a matter of unflagging interest over a span of twenty centuries.

The unique fascination with the early history of Rome is not easy to account for. The people of other cities did not lag behind the Romans in pious curiosity about the origins of their town. In the case of Athens, the mythic lore generated by this patriotic quest is at least as engaging and colourful as the tales of early Rome. Yet the historicity of Theseus, unlike that of Romulus, did not become the object of intense soul-searching and, afterwards, learned debate. Lysurgus, the lawgiver of Sparta, belongs to the same mythical age as the seven kings of Rome, but he never caused the sort of enduring and still continuing controversy that was stirred up by the latter. In short, there can be few fields of ancient history that could rival the origins of Rome as a topic for persistent scholarly attention and ingenuity. What then made Rome so fascinating? The majestic ruins of the ancient city were more accessible to a constant stream of admiring visitors than the Acropolis and the Pyramids. Monumental relics of Roman presence throughout a vast empire kept firing the popular imagination, whereas the ancient Germanic world, for instance, for all its glorious myths, struck few responsive chords. It even defied exploitation for political ends along the lines of Napoleon's and Mussolini's passion for all things Roman. Another reason — perhaps the major reason — for the enduring relevance of early Rome, however, was Livy himself. In the early books of his history he used myths and what other records he could find to fashion a colourful, yet serviceable, account of Rome's beginnings. His narrative inspired imitations but was never equalled and remained quintessential for Machiavelli and Montesquieu.

His sources led Livy to divide Rome's past into three periods. From the time before the foundation of the city, "inspiring deeds

(*decora*) were handed down in poetic fables rather than sound historical records,” leaving Livy with no desire to “either affirm or refute them.”⁸² This was mythical prehistory, and Livy devoted to it just a handful of paragraphs at the beginning of his first book, before reaching the tale of Romulus, the founder of Rome. When Livy wrote, this period was just receiving its classical treatment in Virgil’s great epic. Next, Livy covered in five books the four hundred years from Rome’s foundation to the sack she suffered in c. 386 B.C. at the hands of the Gauls. At this point he reached his second landmark. Down to here events had remained obscure because of the great lapse of time, which blurred the historian’s vision, and also because written records were in scarce use in those early days. Such as there were had suffered wholesale destruction when the Gauls set Rome ablaze.⁸³ The following four hundred years to 9 B.C. were adequately documented and warranted Livy’s broad coverage in the remaining 137 books.

Rome’s beginnings, that is to say Livy’s first five books with their rich residue of myths and legends, is what must concern us in this study; in fact this is what had always captured popular attention. A recent English translation in the *Penguin Classics* judiciously renders the full text of these five books, but no more.⁸⁴ It is true that Livy himself in his preface almost apologized for this part of his work, not because of any lack of factuality, but because he knew that his readers were accustomed to equate history mostly with current affairs. Thus, as he prepared to deal with the earlier periods he feared that they might grow impatient.⁸⁵ As for the presence of *fabula*, on the other hand, his defense is unequivocal:

It is the privilege of pristine times to mingle things human and divine and so add lustre to the origins of cities. Now, if any nation can claim the right to hallow its own beginnings and record gods as its founders, such is the martial glory of the Romans that when they profess that Mars himself was their first parent and the actual father of Rome’s

⁸² Titus Livius 1, Praefatio 6.

⁸³ Titus Livius 6.1.1-3.

⁸⁴ Livy. *The Early History of Rome*, transl. by Aubrey de Séincourt with an Introduction by R.M. Ogilvie (Penguin Books 1960).

⁸⁵ A case in point is Cicero’s brother Atticus. In Cicero’s *De legibus* 1.3.8 he is made to argue that the events of real significance had taken place in living memory: “*quae ab isto [i.e. Cicero] malo praedicari quam, ut aiunt, de Remo et Romulo.*”

founder, the nations of the world will have to accept this as calmly as they accept Roman rule.⁸⁶

The myths of Rome would have to go unchallenged, because the military power of Rome was an unchallengeable reality. As little as fifty years ago, the Japanese might have used this argument to demand credence for the descent of their imperial house from the sun goddess.

Two things are very odd about Livy's patriotic defense of Rome's myth of national origins. One is that the tale mostly consists of Greek imports, the Romans never having developed a coherent mythology of their own. The other puzzle is that Livy made it quite clear that he did not himself believe what he expected the rest of the world to accept. On the former point R.M. Ogilvie remarks: "there is practically no extensive story from early Roman history which cannot be proved to be Greek in origin."⁸⁷ Among the examples he cites there are the tales of Romulus and Remus, how they were exposed by the Tiber and suckled by a she-wolf,⁸⁸ and how Remus taunted his brother on account of the walls until Romulus killed him.⁸⁹ On the second point, Livy himself offers a startling contradiction to his own assertion that the world had no choice but to believe that Mars was Romulus' father.

After the Vestal had been raped she gave birth to twins of doubtful paternity and named Mars as their father, either because she actually believed it, or because her lapse was more excusable if a god had caused it.⁹⁰

Romulus' disappearance, too, is analysed by Livy in an admirably rational and detached manner. The king is reviewing the troops near

⁸⁶ Titus Livius 1, praefatio 7.

⁸⁷ See his introduction to the Penguin Livy cit., 13. and, for greater detail, his *Commentary on Livy Books 1-5* (Oxford 1965), esp. 46ff.

⁸⁸ Titus Livius 1.4.3-7. The Greek tale of Neleus and Pelias, sons of the god Poseidon, exposed on the river Enipeus and suckled by a bitch and a mare, which visibly resembles the Etrusco-Roman story, was itself based on a Near Eastern myth. Livy characterizes the tale of the nursing wolf as traditional ("*ferunt*") and ends it with a Euhemeristic exposition: *Lupa* (she-wolf or prostitute) may point to the meretricious conduct of the shepherd's wife, who is rearing the twins. "*Sunt qui Larentiam vulgato corpore lupam inter pastores vocatam putent: inde locum fabulae ac miraculo datum.*"

⁸⁹ Titus Livius 1.7.2, recalling the Greek tales of Oeneus and Toxeus or Poimander and Leucippus.

⁹⁰ Titus Livius 1.4.2.

the marsh of Capra, when a violent storm comes up. "It covered him with a cloud so thick as to hide him from the sight of the gathered men. From that moment Romulus was no more on earth." When the cloud clears, the crowd sees that the king's seat is empty. Amid the general confusion, the senators who stood next to him assert that he has been raised up to heaven, and eventually everybody joins the growing chorus that is hailing him as a god. Even then, however, some men begin privately to argue that Romulus had been done away with by the senators, and that version too is quietly passed around. But the faith in his apotheosis handsomely wins out, especially thanks to Proculus Julius, a respected senator, who declares that Romulus has appeared to him and given him this message to proclaim: "Go and announce to the Romans: it is willed in heaven that my Rome shall be the capital of the whole world." This is how Livy concludes his account: "It is wonderful how greatly this man's message was believed, and both among the army and the people the sense of loss was assuaged by faith in Romulus' immortality."⁹¹

Romulus' apotheosis is treated by Livy as a traditional belief. It may have taken root at the time of the Etruscan kings of Rome,⁹² and as we shall see, it set an important precedent for the deification of the Caesars. As a further example of Livy's rationalism, one might mention Romulus' successor, Numa Pompilius. In contrast to the warlike Romulus, Numa is presented as a man of peace, a champion of law and religion. His choice as the second king of Rome was confirmed by an augury, the procurement of which Livy explains in great detail. The point that ought to have been the climax of the elaborate narrative, namely divine intervention that grants precisely those signs which the augur had requested, is coyly tucked away in a two-word clause: "Finally [the augur] indicated specifically what signs he hoped would be given. Given they were [*quibus missis*] and Numa was declared king ..."⁹³ The same technique of de-emphasis is used elsewhere in Livy's history.⁹⁴ It can only reinforce the inclination of his readers - at least his modern readers - to interpret the augural intervention as a publicity stunt and its outcome as a foregone conclusion. After all, Livy takes care to mention that the augur was afterwards rewarded with a permanent priesthood. Such an

⁹¹ Titus Livius 1.16.

⁹² Lily Ross Taylor, *The Divinity of the Roman Emperor* (Middletown, Conn. 1931) 42-45.

⁹³ Titus Livius 1.18.9f.

⁹⁴ See e.g. Titus Livius 5.19.1.

interpretation is in keeping with what Livy has subsequently to say about Numa, especially his connection with the goddess Egeria. Numa had finally succeeded in making peace with the tribes surrounding Rome. He may have feared lest the easing of foreign pressure might heighten the chances of domestic unrest. "He resolved that first of all the most useful thing to do with the crowd, given their simplicity and, in those early days, their rough ways, was to instil in them the fear of the gods." Thus Numa concludes that a "miracle tale" is required and "pretends [*simulat*] that in the depth of night he is wont to get together with the goddess Egeria," who advises him about the rites to be instituted.⁹⁵

Livy's Numa uses religion as a soporific for the populace — a clear indication that Livy himself felt that its tenets sometimes offended the enlightened mind and that he owed it to himself to show that they did. None the less, in keeping with official Augustan doctrine, he acknowledged the moral mandate of the Roman state religion and was not prepared to write it off. He recognized, in P.G. Walsh's words, "a symbolic truth at the heart of the Roman religion."⁹⁶ Despite the underlying rational critique, he reported the ancient patriotic myths with care and patience. In fact, the sceptical evaluations tend to disappear from his account in the same measure as myth is losing its prominent hold on Roman history. On the other hand, Livy's faithful reporting of portents, prodigies and dreams continues throughout his narrative. It may well be that his rationalizing tendency with regard to myths and his tolerance of portents as a possible expression of divine will were both inspired by the Stoicism of his age. Livy's personal genius, alert as it was to the mental climate of the Augustan age, has shaped the *corpus* of early Roman history, as it would continue to be admired and debated through the centuries.

As was noted above, Livy treated Romulus' apotheosis as an ancient popular belief and credited a group of senators acting in concert, and especially an individual senator, Proculus Julius, with having inculcated it. He may have had analogies in mind. When he began to write his history the Roman Senate had recently decreed the deification of murdered Julius Caesar (42 B.C.), giving him a temple (dedicated in 29 B.C.) and his own priest. Moreover, towards the end

⁹⁵ Titus Livius 1.19.4f. See also 1.21.3, where Egeria is Numa's wife (*coniux*).

⁹⁶ P.G. Walsh, *Livy* cit. 49. For what follows here, see Walsh's entire chapter, 46-81, and *Wege zu Livius* ed. Erich Burck (Darmstadt 1977) 467-507.

of Livy's life the Senate formally enrolled Augustus among the gods to be worshipped as part of the Roman state cult (17 September 14 A.D.). The emperor had died the previous month, and before that Senate meeting one senator apparently swore to a vision he had had of Augustus ascending to heaven. This circumstance reminded Cassius Dio of the precedent of Proculus Julius who had borne witness to Romulus' apotheosis. Similar declarations under oath also occurred later on.⁹⁷ From Augustus to Diocletian ruling near the end of the pagan Empire, 284-305, it became normal procedure for the Senate to enroll a deceased emperor among the *divi* of the state cult, unless this honour was ruled out by the ephemeral character and other shortcomings of his reign.

There is nothing unusual about governments issuing edicts and decrees in matters of a state religion. In the ancient Orient the worship even of living rulers was an accepted tradition. Yet, to our own thinking, divinization, for instance the apotheosis of Hercules, is a classical case of myth, and we cannot help feeling puzzled about myths being authenticated, whether by senatorial decree or by the Japanese constitution of 1889, which was later amended to provide universal manhood suffrage.⁹⁸ A political state cult, as it existed in imperial Rome and Shinto Japan, is hard to understand for the Western mentality, which was shaped by the supremely transcendental experience of Judaeo-Christianity. It is true that the Roman divinizations were in large measure an expression of political will at that no more irrational than the English Test Acts (1661, 1672), which made employment in the service of the crown dependent upon receiving the sacraments in accordance with the rites of the Church of England. While there is plenty of evidence for the importance of ruler worship elsewhere in the Roman Empire, including the cities of Italy, in Rome itself divine honours were never granted officially to an emperor in his lifetime.⁹⁹ The paradox of immortalizing mortal rulers was not lost on intellectuals touched by Epicurean and Stoic

⁹⁷ Cassius Dio 56.46. Suetonius, *Divus Augustus* 100.4. Ovid, *Fasti* 2.489-512. Cf. Taylor *The Divinity* cit. 229; Simon Price, "From noble funerals to divine cult: the consecration of Roman Emperors" in *Rituals of Royalty*, ed. D. Canadine and S. Price (Cambridge 1987) 56-105, esp. 73f. See also Justinus Martyr, *Apologiae* 1.21.3 and Tertullianus, *Ad nationes* 1.10.29-33.

⁹⁸ John M. Maki, *Japanese Militarism. Its Cause and Cure* (New York 1945) 114-20, 160.

⁹⁹ Price, "From noble funeral to divine cult" cit. 73, 84f. Taylor, *The Divinity* cit. 232-34, 243. *Le Culte des souverains dans l'Empire romain*, Fondation Hardt, Entretiens XIX (Geneva 1973) 5-6, 29-37, 146-48, 180.

materialism and the Euhemeristic reduction of divinity to a posthumous honour. Lily Ross Taylor has emphasized that the worship of rulers, who were still alive, never took firm roots in Italy.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps in deference to intellectual rationalism, Augustus was content to present himself as the son of *divus Iulius*, the late and now deified Caesar. Perhaps in deference to a popular tradition, he chose to be called *Augustus* — a name that people related to the time-honoured *augurium* by which the heavenly powers had conferred the kingship upon Romulus and directed the successful course of Roman affairs ever since. He let it be known that he had received exactly the same augury of twelve vultures as had sealed the kingship of Romulus.¹⁰¹ Augustus also enriched the state cult with libations decreed for his *genius*, by which it became customary to swear oaths, and appropriated other abstractions such as the *pax Augusta*,¹⁰² pointedly stopping short of the worship of his physical person. Subsequent emperors generally honoured the tradition that had emerged with Augustus. Claudius (41-54 A.D.) went to great lengths to explain why he had, exceptionally, accepted the dedication of a temple to himself in newly conquered Britain, and the dying Vespasian (69-79 A.D.), in sad recognition of his threatening apotheosis is reported to have mused: "*Vae, puto deus fio.*"¹⁰³ While Latin poets beginning with Horace hyperbolically acclaimed the divinity of ruling emperors,¹⁰⁴ prose writers may be more representative of the reserve prevailing among Roman intellectuals. Cicero, who was consistently critical of Caesar's cautious advances toward claiming divine honours, insisted that Romulus' apotheosis was unique. While all other deified heroes belonged to the age of primitive fables, Romulus lived in the age of rational thought and historical records — a circumstance that did not make the tale of his apotheosis any truer, but was apt to demonstrate the exceptional merit he had acquired in the service of his sub-

¹⁰⁰ Taylor, *The Divinity* cit. 45ff., 235ff.

¹⁰¹ Taylor, *The Divinity* cit. 158f., drawing attention to Octavian who, in imitation of Romulus, laid claim to an augury of twelve vultures appearing in the sky. Taylor also quotes a popular line from Ennius' *Annales*: "*Augusto augurio postquam incluta condita Roma est*" (Vahlen 502; Skutsch 154).

¹⁰² Taylor, *The Divinity* cit. 151, 190, 199, 245.

¹⁰³ Tacitus, *Annales* 15.74. Suetonius, *Vespasianus* 23.4. Cf. Taylor, *The Divinity* cit. 240f.; G.W. Bowersock in *Le Culte des souverains* cit. 185.

¹⁰⁴ Taylor, *The Divinity* cit. 235f.

jects.¹⁰⁵ Seneca's *Ludus* probably presents an elaborate satire on Claudius' posthumous deification, and the younger Pliny loathed Domitian's indelicate appetite for divine honours in his life-time. Both, however, were content to participate in the general forms of emperor worship associated with the state cult.¹⁰⁶ Cicero, Seneca and the younger Pliny objected for political reasons to specific candidates for divinity. But sceptics like the older Pliny were bound to deny the gods the power to deify men because the gods themselves lacked divinity and supernatural powers. Plutarch, on the other hand, while perhaps not worried by the political mechanism of emperor worship, was rather too pious to believe that men could become gods.¹⁰⁷

The various requirements of Caesar worship formed an integral part of the Roman state cult, and Christians living under the rule of Rome were not exempted. Refusal to honour the official gods and their local temples made the Christians liable to the death penalty. The divine honours they might be expected to offer included sacrifices to the gods for the benefit of the ruling emperor as well as libations before the images of that emperor, and the swearing of an oath by his *genius*. Often the choice was life or death; at the very least compliance with the state cult posed a profound problem that none of the sceptical pagans seems to have experienced. When the early Christian Fathers attacked the state cult in their apologetic writings, they did not normally single out emperor worship. But they insisted that the apotheosis of rulers represented an absurd culmination of anthropomorphic godhead and mercilessly exposed the fallacy of pagan religions, which blurred the differences between God and man. Tertullian noted bitinglly "that nowadays any persons of

¹⁰⁵ Cicero, *De re publica* 1.16.25: "... quibus quidem Romulum tenebris etiamsi natura ad humanum exitum abripuit, virtus tamen in caelum dicitur sustulisse." Ibid. 2.10.18: "Atque hoc eo magis est in Romulo admirandum, quod ceteri, qui dii ex hominibus facti esse dicuntur, minus eruditis hominum saeculis fuerunt, ut fingendi proclivis esset ratio, cum imperiti facile ad credendum impellerentur, Romuli autem aetatem minus his sescentis annis iam inveteratis litteris atque doctrinis omnique illo antiquo ex inculta hominum vita errore sublato fuisse cernimus. Nam si ... Graecorum investigatur annalibus, Roma condita est secundo anno Olympiadis septumae..." Cf. ibid. 2.10.20.

¹⁰⁶ L. Annaeus Seneca, *Opera quae supersunt*, ed. F. Haase (Leipzig 1893-95) I 264-75. C. Plinius Caecilius Secundus, *Panegyricus* 2.3, 52.2-6; cf. 11. Cf. Jean Beaujeu in *Le Culte des souverains* cit. 106-9, also for what follows here.

¹⁰⁷ C. Plinius Secundus, *Naturalis historia* 2.5.18-21, 27, 2.26.97ff., 7.55.188f. G.W. Bowersock in *Le Culte des souverains* cit. 185f. For Plutarch, see Bowersock's arguments and the ensuing discussion, ibid. 187-97, 207f.

accomplishment might be elevated to the rank of gods, regardless of the fact that a few days ago their death was confirmed by public mourning.” Lashing out at the shameless flatterers, he remarked: “to call the emperor a god before his apotheosis amounts to a death wish.”¹⁰⁸ Tertullian was the only Christian apologist who went to some lengths in taking issue with the emperor cult. He argued that the pagans put the emperor even above the Olympian Jupiter and accordingly considered lese-majesty the worst crime of which the Christians were guilty. Sarcastically he added that this made good sense, since any living person was more powerful than a dead and deified one.¹⁰⁹ Ultimately the effect of Caesar worship upon the Christian Fathers was to confirm them in their Euhemeristic notion that all pagan gods, with the exception of nature deities, were really dead men. An abyss separated the Old Testament from the pagan historians. Jewish history was punctuated by the authentic interventions of the only true God; pagan history was punctuated at first by spurious interventions of anthropomorphic gods and subsequently by false signs and portents. Pagan history was an unending record of fables and superstitions, as many heathen intellectuals knew full well. It took the genius of Augustine to demonstrate to his fellow-Christians that pagan history too was part of God’s universal plan, even though the demons of hell were granted a measure of control over actors and events and thus could cause perversion and corruption. What the pagans took to be their gods were always demons acting under the guise of forces of nature or, more commonly, of dead and deified humans.¹¹⁰ Augustine set a new standard in the critical analysis of Roman history from a Christian viewpoint. He had an impressive command of the Roman historians, cleverly exploited contradictions and disagreements between their accounts of the same events and keenly registered any hints of rational doubt in their treatment of the state religion. But his view of history was too sophisticated to have much of an impact upon the medieval chroniclers.

¹⁰⁸ Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 10.10: “... cum hodie iam politi, quos ante paucos dies luctu publico mortuos sint confessi, in deos consecrent.” Ibid. 34.4: “maledictum est ante apotheosin deum Caesarem nuncupari.”

¹⁰⁹ Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 28.3.

¹¹⁰ Aurelius Augustinus, *De civitate Dei* 7.33, cf. 3.10f., 8.26.

One more aspect of Roman historical thought needs to be considered here, since it reveals new angles of the problem of fact versus fiction. The Latin historians were not given to theorizing about their craft. By and large, they abandoned the tradition established by Thucydides and avidly taken up by their Greek counterparts. Unlike the latter, the Latins did not pause to set forth the rules they wished to follow in their examination of the past. Livy offers just a few theoretical remarks at the beginning of his history; Suetonius offers none. Tacitus offers some rare digressions.¹¹¹ The reason for this perhaps was not indifference but rather a feeling that the theoretical aspects of historiography had been properly covered by Cicero. Perhaps assisted by a momentous rediscovery of Thucydides,¹¹² Cicero developed an amazing interest in historical craftsmanship which, if we are to trust his dialogues, was also shared by the circle of his friends. Of course, Cicero did not himself write historical works in the narrow sense of the term. Like Aristotle, he dealt with history in a wider context of literary activity, thus reinforcing the general tendency to deny history the status of a separate discipline. To an even greater extent than Aristotle's remarks in the *Poetics*, Cicero's thoughts about history and the rules for its writing continued to reverberate for a very long time. Whereas Aristotle and subsequently Quintilian¹¹³ (c.35-c.100 A.D.) looked to poetry when they wished to define history within a wider context, Cicero was primarily concerned with the summation of historical precedents, such as a public speaker, in particular a lawyer, would use it in support of his case.¹¹⁴ Cicero's ringing formulations of the goals of history were, nevertheless, respected as suitable guidelines by Livy¹¹⁵ and countless historiographers of later ages.

In the *Orator* Cicero maintains that the public speaker must be familiar not only with natural philosophy and civil law, but also with history:

¹¹¹ Tacitus, *Annales* 4.32f.; *Historiae* 2.50.2.

¹¹² Donald Earl, "Prologue-form in Ancient Historiography" in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, ed. H. Temporini, I-2 (Berlin 1972) 842-56, esp. 854f.

¹¹³ M. Fabius Quintilianus, *Institutio oratoria* 10.1.31-34. Quintilian echoes Cicero when discussing how the public speaker is to use the "rich nutrient juice" of historical material, and in the process gives his famous definition of history as a *carmen solutum*, a kind of poem in prose.

¹¹⁴ Cicero, *De legibus* 1.2.5: Historiography is the genre of writing most closely related to oratory, "*opus ... unum hoc oratorium maxime*;" also *De oratore* 2.15.62. In general for the following see Fornara, *The Nature of History* cit., 91-141.

¹¹⁵ P.G. Walsh, *Livy* cit., 20-45, 272f.

To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to remain always a child. For what is the worth of human life, unless it is woven into the life of our ancestors by the records of history? Moreover, the mention of Antiquity and the citation of examples give a speech authority and credibility as well as affording the highest pleasure to the audience.¹¹⁶

History is seen here not just as an indispensable tool of the professional orator but as a source of maturity and depth in everyone's culture. In an earlier work Cicero had already laid down the supreme law for all historians, to wit an unconditional commitment to telling the whole truth without flattery or spite.¹¹⁷ In the same context he had expressed his faith in the powers of *historia*. Like a witness in court, she could enlighten the past and keep it alive; indeed she could impart lessons that might affect a person's whole life.¹¹⁸ On closer examination one may, however, find a potential for troubling contradictions in Cicero's fulsome expressions of praise for history. Should a witness in court be concerned with pleasing the audience? Cicero often refers to *ornatio*, the art of amplification; for the most part he does so with approval.¹¹⁹ It is also questionable whether telling the whole truth is compatible with history's mandate as *magistra vitae* to select instructive examples. The general indictment is that the Roman historians were more concerned with teaching through examples than with telling the truth. Tacitus, for instance, according to Collingwood's verdict, was led "to distort history systematically." His characters are "mere spectacles of virtue and vice" and "make his character-drawing an outrage on historical truth."¹²⁰

Cicero, too, instructed the practitioner of rhetoric (of which history was a part) to aim for a "likeness of truth" by way of "examples ...;

¹¹⁶ Cicero, *Orator* 34.120: "*Nescire autem quid ante quam natus sis acciderit, id est semper esse puerum. Quid enim est aetas hominis, nisi ea memoria rerum veterum cum superiorum aetate contextitur? Commemoratio autem antiquitatis exemplorumque prolatio summa cum delectatione et auctoritatem orationi affert et fidem.*" The translation is by H.M. Hubbell in the Loeb Classical Library (London and Cambridge, Mass. 1971).

¹¹⁷ Cicero, *De oratore* 2.15.62: "*Nam quis nescit, primam esse historiae legem, ne quid falsi dicere audeat? Deinde, ne quid veri non audeat? Ne qua suspicio gratiae sit in scribendo? Ne qua similitudo?*" Cf. *De legibus* 1.1.5.

¹¹⁸ Cicero, *De oratore* 2.9.36: "*Historia vero testis temporum, lux veritatis, vita memoriae, magistra vitae, nuntia vetustatis, qua voce alia nisi oratoris immortalitati commendatur?*"

¹¹⁹ See e.g. *De legibus* 1.2.5, *De oratore* 2.12.53f.

¹²⁰ Collingwood, *The Idea of History* cit., 39.

occasionally even a fable, although impossible to believe, will yet impress people.”¹²¹ In a famous passage of the dialogue *Brutus*, Cicero himself demonstrates the method of truth-bending exemplification. In comparing Themistocles and Coriolanus he is drawing parallels between their fates that are freely invented. It then falls to Atticus, his friend and a historian, to set the historical record straight. Jokingly Atticus tells his brother: “You can say that; to orators it is permitted to lie about historical facts in order to bring some aspects into sharper focus.” He goes on to show how Themistocles’ death was reliably reported by Thucydides, but dramatically misrepresented by others, including the historian Clitarchus, since the true facts gave them no chance for *ornatio* (“... *rheto-ricae et tragice ornare potuerunt, illa mors vulgaris nullam praebebat materiem ad ornatum*”). Atticus ends the argument with another joke, but his analysis is serious. His mirth stems from knowing better; he knows that *ornatio* is in general use and he condones it.¹²² What is more, on one occasion Cicero revealed a stunning desire to see *ornatio* applied to his own record. In 56 B.C. he wrote to his friend L. Lucceius, who was engaged in writing a history of Rome in recent times. Cicero asked him to jump a few decades and take up immediately the years from Cicero’s consulate to his return from exile (63-57). Indeed, his wish was to see his handling of Catiline’s conspiracy treated by Lucceius in a monograph, concentrating “on one subject and one person”. Immortal fame was at stake, and Cicero wanted to make sure of it while he was alive. He was, he admitted, imposing on his friend, and he was doing it with impudence:

Indeed, I am asking you to embellish my actions. Now what if you think they do not deserve embellishment and the trouble you would have to take over it? Never mind, a man who has left the confines of modesty behind him might as well be shameless with a vengeance. Therefore I’ll ask you frankly and stubbornly to embellish my deeds

¹²¹ Cicero, *Partitiones oratoriae* 11.40: “*Maximam autem facit fidem ad similitudinem veri primum exemplum, deinde introducta rei similitudo; fabula etiam non numquam, etsi est incredibilis, tamen homines commovet.*”

¹²² Cicero, *Brutus* 10.42-11.43. The widespread use of rhetorical distortion of facts is the theme of Wiseman’s *Clio’s Cosmetics* cit.

with even more vigour than perhaps you feel, and in that respect to disregard the laws of history.¹²³

The *leges historiae* that Cicero wanted to see disregarded in this case were evidently the ones he had himself established in *De oratore*, amounting to an unconditional commitment to veracity.¹²⁴ As he went on to petition Luceius at great length, it is not likely that he was talking tongue in cheek. What he was craving was indeed immortality on his own terms. Quite obviously he believed that Luceius could twist the historical facts without risking outraged protest on the part of contemporary readers and subsequent historians. Typically, he compared himself to Alexander the Great who wished to have his portrait painted by Apelles and his statue carved by Lysippus. Such works of art might be copied many times, but unless Alexander himself was present, their accuracy could not be challenged. Why did Cicero assume that in the same fashion a historical account was definitive, that it could be repeated but not faulted, except perhaps in matters of style? Surely, he ought to have known better. Perhaps he believed that in this case, as in many others, embellishment was exactly what the public wanted and deserved. Was it a case of law versus equity? Did the rigorous commitment to telling the truth sometimes prevent fairness? In fairness to the public the viciousness of Catiline and the virtue of Cicero would have to be exposed in stark contrast.

By the end of classical Antiquity *historia* and *fabula* still were a team; harnessed together they would go further than each could do alone. No doubt on the basis of precedents derived from Greek methodology of history, Cicero proposed three divisions of narrative, which he called *fabula*, *historia* and *argumentum*. *Fabula* he defined as the account of “events that are neither true nor resembling the truth (*nec verae nec veri similes res*);” *historia* as “actions belonging to a time preceding contemporary recollection (*gesta res ab aetatis nostrae memoria remota*);” and *argumentum* as “an event that is freely invented but might, nevertheless, have happened (*ficta res, quae*

¹²³ Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares* 5.12.2-3: “*Neque tamen ignoro, quam impudenter faciam, qui primum tibi tantum oneris imponam (potest enim mihi denegare occupatio tua), deinde etiam ut ornes mea, postulem. Quid, si illa tibi non tanto opere videntur ornanda? Sed tamen, qui semel verecundiae fines transierit, eum bene et naviter oportet esse impudentem. Itaque te plane etiam atque etiam rogo, ut ornes ea vehementius etiam quam fortasse sentis et in eo leges historiae neglegas.*”

¹²⁴ See above n. 117.

tamen fieri potuit).¹²⁵ Moreover, if the narrative is concerned with persons rather than events, in addition to the above categories the words and thoughts of these persons can be reported and here liveliness (*festivitas*) and embellishments (*ornamenta*) are particularly recommended. Quintilian repeated Cicero's definition of the three categories and added that the public speaker should begin with the historical arguments, which were the more powerful the more true they were.¹²⁶ Isidore of Seville (c.560-636), finally, presented the three categories of reality with regard to the past in a form that remained commonplace throughout the Christian Middle Ages. *Historia* for Isidore meant "true events that actually happened;" *argumenta* were "events that might have happened even though they actually did not;" and *fabulae* were "events that neither happened nor could have."¹²⁷

The three categories of events that happened, did not happen, and might have happened probably originated in Greek historical thought. Sextus Empiricus, writing in about 180-200 A.D., had found them in Asclepiades of Myrleia (first century B.C.) and in turn labelled them *historia*, *mythos* and *plasma*. Sextus took it for granted that history may be treated as a part of grammar. On this assumption he undertook to show that like all other parts of grammar history lacked a proper methodology and thus was not an art (*technē*). It could not be an art, for most of history dealt with "things false and unreal (*pseudē kai anyparkta*)" that could not answer the exigencies of an academic discipline. Sextus' findings were paralleled much later, when it was recognized that astrology and alchemy failed to answer the requirements of scientific treatment. His conclusion was that no methodology existed that permitted one to ascertain the truth or falsehood of historical records.¹²⁸ Sextus was a Pyrrhonist and

¹²⁵ Cicero, *De inventione* 1.19.27. The passage contains other distinctions, which have been omitted here. It is difficult and has been interpreted in different ways. See also *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 1.8.13.

¹²⁶ Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 2.4.2; "... *apud rhetorem initium sit historica, tanto robustior quanto verior*."

¹²⁷ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* 1.44.5.

¹²⁸ Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus grammaticos* 248-69. In 263-66 Sextus introduces the terms of history, legend and fiction, giving examples for each. He gives his last examples for the historical legend and then develops his argument: "... the companions of Diomedes were changed into sea-birds, Odysseus into a horse, and Hecuba into a dog, — such then being the variety in histories, since there exists no art which deals with things false and unreal, and the legends and fictions, which form the main subjects of the historical part with which grammar is concerned, are false and unreal, it will follow that there exists no art which deals with the historical part of

doubtless more sceptical about a historian's ability to determine what was true than any of the great historical writers of Greece and Rome. Moreover, his work had little impact; in the West it went largely unnoticed until a modest revival of interest occurred in fifteenth-century Italy.¹²⁹ Such considerations notwithstanding, Sextus still can be seen as expressing with some finality two conclusions that mark Graeco-Roman thought from Herodotus to the Hellenistic age. The first was that myths and legends formed an integral part of history. The second held that ultimately it was the reader, not the historian, who must decide what was to be believed.

grammar. Hence they [Asclepiades, e.g.] deserve to be laughed at who assert that even if the subject-matter of history lacks method, yet the judging of it will be a matter of art, by means of which we ascertain what is falsely related and what truly." The translation is R.G. Bury's in the Loeb edition of Sextus Empiricus, vol. IV (London - Cambridge, Mass. 1949) 149-51.

¹²⁹ For MSS on record see R.R. Bolgar, *The Classical Heritage and Its Beneficiaries from the Carolingian Age to the End of the Renaissance* (Cambridge 1954) Appendix I; P.O. Kristeller, *Iter Italicum* (London - Leiden 1965 -) II 252, 358.

CHAPTER TWO

FABULA AND HISTORIA
THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE PAST IN THE MIDDLE AGES

I

The Legenda Aurea: Gospel Figures

In the thousand years following Constantine's victory at the Milvian Bridge (312 A.D.), literature as well as art showed primarily a religious slant. Religions tend to impose moral restraint, and medieval Christianity certainly did. Its efforts notwithstanding, some leading forms of literature and art developed powers of imagination and an untrammelled exercise of fantasy, which have, I think, no parallel in Western history. Such was the case with epics, chronicles, sermons, biography and topography, and also with sculpture and book illumination. Amid explosive spurts of creative energy the distinction between fact and fiction, *historia* and *fabula*, was particularly prone to be ignored, or at least neglected.

In this chapter we shall exemplify this ceaseless creation of new myths and legends¹ with some figures encountered in the New Testament (Section I), with some emperors (Section II) and, especially, with some popes (Sections III-V). We shall not claim that these examples are any more representative than other ones that might suggest themselves. It is hoped, however, that they will serve a twofold purpose. The ancient myths were often formed even before historiography began and thus appear in the earliest narratives fully developed, rather like Pallas Athene, who had jumped out of her father's head in helmet and armour. By contrast, the growth of medieval legends from embryonic stages to maturity often occurs in a succession of writers whose texts exist and can be examined. We can investigate how later writers developed the material received from their predecessors. To do so is one purpose of this chapter; it should

¹ See Francesco Lanzoni, *Genesi, svolgimento e tramonto delle leggende storiche* (Rome 1925).

enable us to suggest some conclusions about the genesis of historical myths and legends. While this is of obvious importance to our study, the other purpose matters even more. It is to offer some insight into the creative potential of the Middle Ages and to convey some sense of the exuberant jungle of historical fiction in that period. Perhaps no single work can better represent that jungle than Jacobus a Voragine's *Legenda aurea*, which has therefore been chosen as a basis for the following. Jacobus a Voragine, a Dominican from Varazze, was archbishop of Genoa when he died in 1298. He began his career in the administration of his order in 1267; by that time he had probably completed the bulk of what was to remain for centuries the most representative and widely read collection of saints' lives, arranged according to their anniversaries in the liturgical calendar. Over a thousand manuscripts are known to exist, the oldest one dating from 1282; and at least 156 editions were printed between 1470 and 1500. In the sixteenth century demand for printed copies was shifting to vernacular translations, while learned critics began to decry the *Legenda aurea* as a mass of absurd tales. Some of these critics were not even protestants, but Catholic Erasmians — a fact that visibly worried the learned Jean Bolland. In the general preface of his monumental *Acta sanctorum* (1643) he took issue with the assailants of Jacobus and defended not so much his credibility as rather his wisdom, judgment and fidelity to his sources.² It is clear then that for several centuries after its composition the *Legenda aurea* remained representative of the interests of a wide and varied reading public. Moreover, as we shall see shortly, it absorbed and amalgamated traditions that in some cases reached back all the way to the frontier between Judaism and nascent Christianity.

The *Legenda aurea* exceeds a mere collection of saints' lives in that it devotes a number of chapters to other liturgical feast days, especially those associated with the earthly life of Christ. Jacobus' purpose in compiling the work was practical and pastoral. He wished to stimulate and assist clerics as they were praying and preaching their tradition-hallowed way through the liturgical year, especially by imparting suitable information about the saints of the calendar. In

² Jean Bolland in *Acta sanctorum Januarii* I (Brussels 1643, repr. 1863) xix-xx. Cf. Sherry L. Reames, *The Legenda Aurea. A Reexamination of Its Paradoxical History* (Madison, Wisc. 1985) 11-15, and for the wide circulation of the *Legenda*, 3-5, 27-29; also *Legenda aurea. Sept siècles de diffusion*, ed. Brenda Dunn-Lardeau (Montreal — Paris 1986) 19-24. In general: Alain Boureau, *La Légende dorée. Le système narratif de Jacques de Voragine* (Paris 1984).

good scholastic fashion he saw intellectual probing as being ancillary, but none the less germane, to spiritual meditation. He wished to arouse and satisfy the curiosity of his clerical readers, and also to offer them material for their homilies. As we shall see, he encouraged them to make a critical judgement as to how and how far the saints' legends should be shared with the general public. He did evidently not anticipate the immense popularity his work would achieve precisely among laymen. Thus he did nothing to forestall the biting criticism of Renaissance scholars, who saw the book in everybody's hands and everything in it taken at face value, whether it was a myth, a legend or a historical fact.

With regard to historical facts, Jacobus shows himself neither ignorant nor unreceptive.³ After all and despite the overriding spiritual motivation, his work is also a biographical dictionary of saints. It is not surprising, however, that *fabula* is given a wider window than *historia*. Jacobus' goal was inspiration, and tales are often more inspiring than facts. Hence it made sense for him to warn his readers lest they mistake a fable for the truth, but then to relate the story in lavish detail. This is the sin that proved unforgivable to the historical consciousness as it has developed since the Renaissance. Here also lies the gulf that separates Jacobus' approach to the past from more modern views. He knew what he did not want to believe, and sometimes he said so. Yet even saying so, to him as formerly to Herodotus, was absolutely no reason for suppressing the story, no matter how unbelievable it was. More often than not he fails to mark his material as either fabulous or factual; but occasionally it seems to have occurred to him that he had better say a word on the matter. In contrast to Herodotus' procedure, however, he never presents two separate versions of a saint's life, one according to reliable

³ The presence of a historical dimension, and also its limits, are reflected even in the prologue of the *Legenda aurea*. Jacobus attempts to relate a fourfold division of the liturgical year to four consecutive epochs of universal history and to four spiritual states of man (and also to the four times of the day and the four seasons). The age from Adam to Moses corresponds to the period from Septuagesima to Easter, when, Jacobus says, Genesis is read in the liturgy; this is a time of the Fall and human erring. The second period, from Moses to the birth of Christ or from Advent to Christmas, marks human renewal. The third, apparently coinciding with Christ's presence on earth, is the liturgical season from Easter to Pentecost, when Revelation is read; it signifies reconciliation. Finally there follows "our present life", a time of pilgrimage, liturgically the period between Pentecost and Advent. In the actual text following this prologue I cannot, however, discover any attempt to relate a saint's vicissitudes to the spiritual state governing his or her day in the calendar, nor to characteristics prevailing in the four ages of history.

documentation, and the other in keeping with the legend.⁴ His exercise of critical acumen being thus confined to erratic flashes, his work regularly exhibits the anthropological criteria for a mythical, rather than historical, experience of the past. Natural curiosity as to how and why things were coming to pass is requited with answers that set little store by logic and sometimes defy elementary rules of consistency with regard to persons, places and dates. Explanations are normally offered on the basis of a single application; contradictions are irrelevant because the reader is not expected to make the kind of comparison that would reveal their existence.

While the organizational principle is provided by the calendar sequence of saints' lives, it is handled with considerable freedom. When commemorating the apostle Matthias (24 February),⁵ Jacobus would eventually relate how this disciple was chosen to fill the vacancy among the twelve apostles that had been created by the apostasy of Judas Iscariot. In one of his rational spurts he even reported conflicting opinions on the manner of Matthias' election to the apostolate; Jerome and the Venerable Bede offered one version, Dionysius the Areopagite another. After that, the life is completed by an account of Matthias' miracles and martyrdom; however, the first two thirds of the entire text are reserved for an even more compelling topic, namely Judas.⁶ What was the matter with the disciple who betrayed his Lord for thirty pieces of silver? The gospels do not reveal more than two contradictory versions of his pitiful death,⁷ but his legend began forming in the first centuries of Christianity. Jacobus appears to offer the earliest known version of the fully developed tale, and what a tale it is.⁸

The *Legenda aurea* presents Judas as the son of one Ruben, alias Simon,⁹ and his wife, Cyborea. After having conceived Judas, his

⁴ His treatment of Constantine the Great (below p. 84) is exceptional and does not, of course, concern a saint.

⁵ Jacobus a Voragine, *Legenda aurea*, ed. Theodor Graesse (Osnabrück 1969, reproducing the third edition of 1890) ch. 45.

⁶ Two German nuns, who produced vernacular versions of Jacobus' legend of Matthias, fully exercised the prerogative Jacobus had accorded his readers and omitted most of his material on Judas; see Konrad Kunze in *Legenda aurea. Sept siècles de diffusion*, ed. Dunn-Lardeau cit. 246.

⁷ Mt. 27.5; Acts 1.18.

⁸ *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, ed. Hanns Bächtold-Stäubli et al. (Berlin 1927-42) IV 799-808.

⁹ In John 6.72, 13.26, Judas' father is called Simon (Iscariot). Jacobus points out, however, that the following story is uncanonical ("*legitur enim in quadam hystoria licet apocrypha*").

mother has a horrifying dream that leads to the baby's exposure in a basket, which is duly carried away by the tidal current. He survives, of course, grows up, slays the son of his benefactress and flees to Jerusalem. There Pilate finds him to be congenial to his own depraved character and makes him his favourite. One day Pilate happens to spot some apples in Ruben's orchard and is seized by an inordinate desire to taste them. Judas undertakes it to indulge his master and, in the process, kills Ruben. Unaware that the slain man is his father, he marries Cyborea, his own mother. When the truth transpires a penitent Judas approaches Christ and is admitted among the disciples. Jacobus concludes his tale with a brief reference to the biblical account of Judas' betrayal, combining the two incongruous versions of his death.¹⁰

The major elements of this tale are all mythical. Judas is exposed in a basket like Moses.¹¹ Like Oedipus he is sullied by patricide and incest. He connives with Pilate's uncontrolled desire for apples as Adam connived with Eve's. Jacobus knew that Judas' tale was of the order of *fabula* rather than *historia*. Both at the beginning and the end he flanked it with a caveat, lest the reader overlook the difference between Judas' betrayal confirmed by the gospels and his other actions and circumstances drawn from a "*hystoria apocrypha*." In the second instance Jacobus is specific: "up to here our source is the aforementioned apocryphal history; whether this should be repeated in public is something the reader must decide for himself, but really it should rather be dropped than affirmed." If readers were to make their own decision, Jacobus, of course, had a good reason for not dropping the story, especially since Judas' adventures formed part of a wider scenario.

In his rake's progress Judas had been egged on by Pilate. Unlike Judas, Pilate is unquestionably historical in that some data of his life are documented independently of the New Testament tradition. In 26 A.D. the emperor Tiberius appointed him procurator of the province

¹⁰ Matt. 27:5 states that Judas hanged himself; Acts 1:18 explains that he fell headlong and burst open in the middle, so that his entrails gushed out. It is true that a reconciliation had already been initiated by the Vulgate, which mistranslates a Greek term in Acts. Jacobus need do little more than repeat the Vulgate text: "*et suspensus crepuit medius ...*" Erasmus later corrected the error and quoted a correct Latin rendering from Augustine.

¹¹ Jacobus' term for basket ("*fiscella*") is the one used in the Vulgate for Moses' analogous adventure.

Judaea, including Samaria and Idumaea. Flavius Josephus shows that he failed to build a passable relationship with the people and the Jewish authorities. After an unjustified military intervention in Samaria in 36, he was suspended by the legate of Syria, L. Vitellius, and sent back to Rome for trial.¹² Eusebius reported that he killed himself in 39, during the reign of Caligula,¹³ but this tradition could be part of the incipient legend. Again it is the *Legenda aurea*, which presents the fully-grown version of that legend.¹⁴ Considering the Christian point of view, some developments are logical. Pilate's downfall had to be caused by his iniquity towards Jesus Christ the Saviour rather than towards the wicked Jews. Indeed, his connections with the Jewish prince Herod were seen to reflect the typical phases of a relationship between two villains. Initially Pilate's career is promoted by Herod, who recognizes in him a kindred character. Subsequently they fall out with each other, but their vile conduct in Christ's trial brings about a reconciliation.¹⁵ Most elements of Jacobus' story, however, utterly defy logic, while they do present mythical parallels to the Judas tale. Pilate is the illegitimate son of one King Tyrus with a certain Pyla, daughter of Atus; hence the child's name, Pylatus. As a youth he kills his father's legitimate son and is sentenced to die, but Tyrus spares him and sends him to Rome as a hostage in lieu of the annual tribute due to the emperor. In Rome, Pilate kills his fellow-hostage, the son of the king of France. Later, when Pilate holds office in Judaea, Tiberius falls sick; he hears about the healing power of a man in Jerusalem and sends for him. Pilate is greatly embarrassed, for Jesus has just been put to death. While Pilate procrastinates, Tiberius' emissary finds the matron "Veronica," and the emperor is eventually healed by the veronica, her cloth bearing the likeness of Christ. Next Pilate is brought to Rome to face the emperor's wrath; but cunningly he wraps himself into Christ's seamless coat, at the sight of which Tiberius forgets his anger. In the end Pilate is brought to justice and kills himself. His corpse, thrown into the Tiber, causes endless storms and floods. The frightened

¹² Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae* 18.85-89.

¹³ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia ecclesiastica* 2.7, *Chronicon* ad annum 39.

¹⁴ In ch. 53, on the Passion of Our Lord (following the Annunciation, 25 March).

¹⁵ Luke 23.12: "The same day Herod and Pilate became friends; till then there had been a standing feud between them." Jacobus explains their falling out with each other by stating that Pilate went to Rome behind Herod's back. In return for an immeasurable sum of money he obtained from Tiberius official confirmation of the appointment which, hitherto, he had held informally from Herod.

Romans have it transferred to the Rhone at the city of Vienne, whose name really means “*via Gehennae*.” Causing everywhere the same havoc, it is moved on to Lausanne and finally to the high mountains.

Again this account is carefully flanked with the same credits to the mysterious “*hystoria apocrypha*” and the same appeal to the reader’s discretion as we have found at the beginning and the end of the Judas tale. In a more scholarly vein Jacobus also mentioned some less dubious sources. To one of his favourites, Petrus Comestor’s *Historia scholastica*,¹⁶ he owed factual details (originally gathered from Josephus) about Pilate’s misguided action against Samaritan worshippers at Mount Garizim in Samaria. Petrus also provided information about an (invented) exile of Pilate in his native Lyon. Jacobus hastened to add, however, that the latter report was not confirmed by Eusebius and the Venerable Bede, who only mentioned Pilate’s suicide. From the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*¹⁷ Jacobus reported the sequel of Pilate’s conversation with Christ, which in the Gospel of John (18.38) breaks off so tantalizingly with Pilate’s question “What is truth?” There is indeed an enigmatic touch to the gospel accounts about Pilate. They keep the reader craving for more information, and that explains the singular attention paid to Pilate in legend, literature and folklore. The logical nexus between his well-documented hostility towards the Jews and the gospel accounts of his open mind towards Jesus, a Jewish dissident, was noticed less and less. As the legend progressed the Roman official simply became the accomplice of the wicked Jews, whom he resembled in criminal disposition. His end was as he deserved it. Thereafter, restless like the wandering Jew, his ghost shook the earth and stirred the water in the mountains, rivers and lakes of many regions, wherever his cursed

¹⁶ Petrus Comestor, *Historia scholastica*, in *Evangelia* ch. 94, in *Acta* ch. 53 (PL 198.1585, 1680). Petrus’ work was written c. 1169-75. Cf. Flavius Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae* 18.85-87.

¹⁷ *The Gospel of Nicodemus* 3, ed. H.C. Kim (Toronto 1973) 19. The earliest version dates from around 600. In ch. 69, on St. John before the Latin Gate (6 May), Jacobus also mentioned the spurious letter of Pilate to Tiberius (or Claudius), which forms the last chapter of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. Jacobus, however, referred to an intermediate source. In ch. 67, on St. James the Apostle, he reported another version of Pilate’s message to Tiberius, which had been invented to account for the destruction of Jerusalem by Vespasian and Titus. In the same chapter he accurately reported striking details about Josephus’ defense of Jotapata and his subsequent conversation with Vespasian; cf. Flavius Josephus, *De bello Judaico* 3.355-408.

body had been transported. The best-known spot is Mount Pilatus near Lucerne, complete with its haunted mountain lake.¹⁸

As we have seen, the *Legenda aurea* describes an ongoing relationship between Pilate and a Jewish ruler called Herod, who was likewise a protégé of the Romans. In chapter 53, on the Lord's Passion, both are presented as evil men and friends turned enemies, but eventually reconciled through their cooperation in the killing of Christ. In this passage the only clue to Herod's identity is a clause referring to his administration of Galilee. At the same time, however, Jacobus leaves his readers with the incorrect impression that Herod had also ruled Judaea, including Jerusalem. This Herod was indeed the tetrarch of Galilee, Antipas by name, son of Herod the Great and his fourth wife, Malthace, and brother to Archelaus, ethnarch of Judaea, until he was deposed by Augustus and his territory added to the Roman province of Syria. Both brothers did in fact use the name Herod, as if it were their own. To make confusion worse, one who did not, Agrippa I, nephew to Antipas and Archelaus, is also called Herod in Acts 12. Moreover, there were also another son and a grandson of Herod the Great, both of whom were properly named Herod. It is true that in the New Testament a certain effort is made to distinguish various members of the house of Herod by office or by name, but this could not prevent guesses and mistakes among major ecclesiastical writers, nor complete muddle among many ordinary readers of the Bible.

This unhealthy state of affairs prompted Jacobus to apply himself with special care to his task as a historian. But despite his valiant efforts, he too risked taxing the ingenuity of his readers.¹⁹ His earliest references to the house of Herod occur in his text for Innocents' day (ch. 10, 28 December). He started out by advising the reader that three different Herods are mentioned in Holy Scripture: Antipas, who had John the Baptist beheaded (and according to Luke played a part in Jesus' trial); Agrippa, who had James killed and Peter jailed; and, of course, Herod (the Great), whom he called Herod of Ascalon, the murderer of the innocent babes of Bethlehem. To help the reader's memory, Jacobus even offered a little jingle on the three

¹⁸ Arturo Graf, *Miti, leggende e superstizioni del Medio Evo* (Turin 1892) II 141-66. *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, ed. Bächtold-Stäubli cit. VII 25-28.

¹⁹ Typically, a modern English translation tries, but fails, in the alphabetical index to sort out Jacobus' references; see *The Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine*, tr. G. Ryan and H. Ripperger, new ed. (New York 1969).

Herods. Following this clarification, Jacobus was free to report savory items selected from various Fathers and medieval chroniclers, who had blended the gospel accounts of the Magi and the Innocents with biographical information on Herod the Great, derived from Josephus. Considerable space is allotted to Herod's unhappy relations with his gifted sons Alexander and Aristobulus, both "born of the same Jewish mother" (Mariamme). Josephus relates the tragic climax of this family drama, which came in 7 B.C. when Alexander and Aristobulus were put to death together with three hundred of their supporters in the army.²⁰ At earlier turns of that tragic story Herod had undertaken his last two visits to the emperor Augustus in Italy (17 and 12 B.C.)²¹ In the *Legenda aurea* a garbled account of these developments is combined with the murder of the Innocents. Herod had gone to Rome after the appearance of the three Magi. When he returned a year later, he perpetrated the blood bath of Bethlehem, ordering the slaughter of all children of "the age of two years or less."²² Or was it the children over two and up to five years of age, as Chrysostom interpreted the passage? This view was supported by the fact "that we have some bones of the Innocents that are too large to have belonged to two-year olds. It could be objected, however, that humans then had a much larger frame than is the case today." However that may be, Herod received swift punishment. An infant son of his had been taken to Bethlehem for nursing and was killed with the rest.

Jacobus continued his scholarly *mélange* of facts and fiction concerning the Herods when turning to the Feast of the Decollation of St. John the Baptist (29 August, ch. 125). He firmly rejected the "vulgar" tradition, according to which Herodias, the wife of Antipas, would have dropped dead as soon as she held John's severed head in her hands, because "by God's will the head blew a breath into her face." Instead Jacobus recommended acceptance of what the "saintly chroniclers" had to say, in particular the *Historia scholastica*, which had Antipas and Herodias end their lives miserably in exile at Lyon. This was another tradition backed by the authority of Josephus,²³ whereas Eusebius referred to Vienne, which actually was the place of

²⁰ Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae* 16. 393f.

²¹ *The Jewish People in the First Century*, ed. S. Safrai and M. Stern, I (Assen 1974) 263f.

²² Jacobus repeated the Vulgate's version of Matt. 2.16: "*a bimatu et infra*."

²³ Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae* 18.252-55.

exile of Antipas' brother Archelaus.²⁴ We have seen earlier that the medieval tradition dispatched Pilate, or his corpse, to the same places in the Rhone valley. To the medieval mind the journey from the Holy Land to the south of France was accomplished with ease, not only by Pilate and the Herods, but also by that weighty company of saints comprised of Mary Magdalen, Martha, Lazarus, Maximinus and others, whose relics begin to appear at the time of the Crusades.²⁵

A third Herod, Agrippa, caught Jacobus' attention when he dealt with the Feast of St. Peter in Chains (1 August, ch. 110). It was Agrippa who had cast Peter into prison. When the apostle was miraculously set free by an angel, Agrippa's punishment could not be delayed. He threatened the hapless prison guards with dire revenge, but God would not permit innocent men to come to grief on account of Peter's escape. Agrippa's punishment had long been coming. As a young man he had been imprisoned in Rome for having imprudently wished death to the emperor Tiberius in order that his own good friend, Gaius Caligula, might gain the throne. Disheartened, the prisoner is leaning against a tree in the jail compound, when a German fellow-convict draws his attention to an owl on that tree. The German foretells him swift delivery, power and honours, but also death five days after he would have met another owl. The prophecy comes true, of course. Agrippa has gone to Caesarea and is attending a gala reception. At the very moment the populace is hailing him as a god, he spots the owl. This curious tale is spun out at great length in Josephus' *Antiquities*²⁶ and was taken up, as it deserved to be, by a long succession of Christian writers, headed by the author of Acts 12 and Eusebius,²⁷ who both reported the events of Caesarea only. When Jacobus repeated the story he referred for the first part to the *Historia scholastica* and for the second part directly to Josephus, but since Acts and Eusebius had replaced the owl by an angel, Jacobus diplomatically ascribed the fatal omen to an "angel, that is to say an owl."²⁸

²⁴ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia ecclesiastica* 1.11.3; cf. the German translation, *Kirchengeschichte*, ed. H. Kraft (Darmstadt 1967) 109 n.92. Vienne is specified as Archelaus' place of banishment in Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae* 17.344. As for Antipas, the place where he ended his life was perhaps Lugdunum Convenarum on the northern slopes of the Pyrenees; see also *The Jewish People in the First Century*, ed. Safrai and Stern cit. I 287.

²⁵ See e.g. *Legenda aurea*, ed. Graesse cit., ch. 96, on St. Mary Magdalen (22 July).

²⁶ Josephus, *Antiquitates Juadaicae* 18.186-200, 19.343-50.

²⁷ Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 2.10.1-9.

²⁸ "... vidit insidentem super funiculum capiti suo angelum, id est bubonem."

In this first section we have examined Jacobus' treatment of some persons and events found in the New Testament. In this case a medieval writer never needed to worry whether or not to trust his source. It went without saying that the divinely inspired authors of the New Testament always spoke the truth, so that no error could occur in the historical material they were inspired to relate.²⁹ Jacobus relied on the Bible to place his narrative on solid foundations of historical fact. The foremost function of material added from other sources was to complete or flesh out stories left unfinished or disjointed by the New Testament writers. In this fashion Jacobus handled Pilate's questioning of Jesus, the puzzling relations between Herod and Pilate and the fate of both after the crucifixion. As for Judas' end, he simply combined the contradictory accounts of Matthew and Acts, regardless of the resulting lack of plausibility.³⁰ When excerpting such supplementary information from Josephus, Eusebius, Petrus Comestor and others, Jacobus did not distinguish, as a modern historian would, between primary and secondary sources. But as has been shown above, he did in some cases differentiate between the trustworthy "saintly chroniclers" and a fabulous "*hystoria apocrypha*." When he recognised a tall tale, we need not wonder why he would repeat it nevertheless. His purpose is clear; he addressed himself to fellow-clergymen and reported what he deemed fit for them to peruse. And sometimes he reminded them that they must decide what should be repeated in public sermons.

When the factual truth of a story was not guaranteed by the Bible medieval historians could no longer take it for granted. God's Word apart, there was no perfect truth. This simple fact should have enormously complicated the task of any chronicler, but for the most part it did not. As even the most inspired and saintly authors were subject to human erring, the chronicler himself could neither hope, nor be expected, to avoid it. For every occurrence in the past it was therefore best to set one's trust in a single source of high repute and to copy it faithfully and with confidence. Only a small number of

²⁹ In the preceding note Jacobus' expression "... *angelum, id est bubonem*" might at first glance be taken for a typical case of Euhemeristic rationalization, the realistic incidence explaining the supernatural one narrated in *Acts*. But this would imply a precision untypical of Jacobus' writing style. Clearly he did not want to say that what appeared to be an angel was actually just an owl. If he pondered the problem at all, he might have concluded that Luke revealed the presence of an angel under the disguise of Josephus' owl.

³⁰ See above n. 10.

medieval historians perceived their task to be more complex and in need of greater discrimination. That Jacobus a Voragine was among them will become clear as we examine his treatment of some emperors and popes.

II

The Legenda Aurea: Emperors

Appropriately enough, the first emperor to make his appearance in the *Legenda aurea* is Augustus (30 B.C.-14 A.D.). In his sixth chapter Jacobus a Voragine contemplates the meaning of the Christmas feast ("On the Birth according to the Flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ"). In dealing with this unique event, he finds place for several references to Augustus, all of them showing the master of the Roman Empire reverently bowing to a yet greater master. The gems in Jacobus' account are provided by an ancient Christian tradition, part of which he had found in a sermon of Pope Innocent III (1198-1216).³¹ Although he mentions Innocent alone, additional details of Jacobus' account correspond to twelfth-century versions of the *Mirabilia Romae*.³² On the day of Christ's birth several miracles occur in the city of Rome, and it is worth noting that the Christian accounts of them take their clues from pagan portents and omens reported by such authors as Cassius Dio, Pliny the Elder and Suetonius.³³ Two of these legends, which involve Augustus personally, are presented by Jacobus with loving care and some thoughtful additions that are apparently of his own invention. To mark the twelfth year of Augustus' peace, the Romans build a splendid temple dedicated to Pax; in it they place a statue of Romulus. At their request, the god Apollo announces by way of an oracle that the temple would stand

³¹ *Sermo II in nativitate Domini*, PL 217.457.

³² See below ch. II n. 88.

³³ *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, ed. Theodor Klauser et al. (Stuttgart 1950 —) I.1002f. Cassius Dio (73.24) took it for an omen when the temple of Pax burned down in 192 A.D. For the following, see Eugen von Frauenholz, "Imperator Octavianus Augustus in der Geschichte und Sage des Mittelalters" *Historisches Jahrbuch* 46 (1926) 86-122, esp. 106-13. Gerhart von Graevenitz, *Mythos. Zur Geschichte einer Denkgewohnheit* (Stuttgart 1987) 154-63.

until a virgin will give birth. When they heard that they said: "so it will last for ever." ... But in the very night the Virgin gave birth, the temple collapsed right down to its foundations, and in its place now stands the church of Santa Maria Nuova.

Jacobus' other tale reports that the Roman Senate was so impressed with Augustus' world-wide conquests that it wished to vote him divine honours. But Augustus, conscient of his own mortality, prudently declines. The senators suggest that he consult the Sibyl. He meets her alone in his private chamber, appropriately on the very day of the Nativity, and inquires whether one greater than himself would ever be born. The answer comes in form of a vision. The emperor beholds a golden circle around the sun and in its centre a most beautiful virgin with a boy on her lap. A voice announces: "this is the altar of heaven (*ara coeli*)," and the Sibyl explains: "this boy is greater than you; him you must worship." So Augustus' chamber is presently dedicated to the Holy Virgin and is called henceforward "Santa Maria in Ara Coeli." Jacobus permits some flashes of historical insight to penetrate the healthy growth of the *fabula* he is reporting. He knew that the emperor's proper name was Octavian and that Augustus was an adopted cognomen. Although he could not link the latter to the cult of the deified Romulus, he was aware of that cult and may have realized its importance to Augustus. The emperor's prudent restraint in accepting divine honours, which we have noted in another context,³⁴ is also reflected in Jacobus' tale of the encounter with the Sibyl. Did he feel, one wonders, that a good legend needed to draw strength from roots anchored in historical fact?

Among the pagan emperors, Trajan (98-117) held a very special place in the historical consciousness of the Middle Ages. Weighty theological problems notwithstanding, the leading authorities were inclined to believe that his soul was in Heaven. Jacobus' treatment of this thorny issue is both appropriate and exemplary. He realized that Trajan's case posed not only a theological dilemma but also a historical one. Having perused such sources as Orosius, Jacobus would be aware of Trajan's solid achievements. He had, said Orosius, restored Germany east of the Rhine to stable conditions and then gone on to conquer and colonize Dacia, Armenia and Mesopotamia. He had

³⁴ See above p. 53.

restored the empire and also its administrative apparatus; moreover he had chosen a worthy successor in the person of Hadrian. In his last years he was forced to deal with a general rebellion of his Jewish subjects, and in persecuting the Christians he showed himself moderate and rather sensible.³⁵ Nevertheless, the Middle Ages could not ignore that Trajan was a persecutor. The Christian tradition honoured the names of those who had been martyred in his reign. Tertullian first introduced the Christian world to the famous exchange of letters between Pliny the Younger, then imperial governor of Bithynia, and Trajan. Pliny attested the Christians their exemplary conduct, while the emperor wisely ordered that prosecutions be avoided whenever this was possible without a breach of law. But Tertullian also emphasized that the repugnant laws were not rescinded and that Christians still were punished for being Christians. Since the officials were discouraged from investigating against them, plainly, they were not criminals; yet they were punished. And while criminals were tortured to confess an offense, the Christians were tortured so that they might deny one, namely their faith in Jesus Christ.³⁶

So Trajan was not only a pagan, he was an active persecutor of Christians, and yet he had entered Paradise. His story was incongruous in terms of history as well as theology. Jacobus was prepared to face at least the historical dilemma. He did so in his chapter on the holy martyr Ignatius (ch. 36, 1 February), who had suffered, it was said, in Trajan's reign. As his sources Jacobus identified Cassiodorus and, especially, Eusebius, but when the latter attempted to gloss over the contradictory roles ascribed to the emperor, Jacobus did not follow him. Eusebius had acknowledged Trajan's moderation and avoided mentioning him when reporting the martyrdom of Ignatius, which had occurred "at that time."³⁷ Compared with Eusebius the *Legenda aurea's* account is happily entangled in a web of legends but, curiously, also closer to the historical situation. It is Ignatius, the "bishop" of Antioch, who "hurried forth and of his own accord pointed out that he was a Christian." He cajoles and nettles the lions to devour him and only fears a miracle that might save his life, as happened to other Christians. For his part, Trajan uses incentives at first (but subsequently

³⁵ Paulus Orosius, *Historiae adversus paganos* 7.12, 27, 34.

³⁶ Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 2.6-10, citing Pliny the Younger, *Letters* 10.96-7.

³⁷ Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 3.33-6.

torture) to induce Ignatius to compromise his faith.³⁸ While omitting most of the authentic texts Eusebius had quoted, Jacobus begins his offerings to *fabula* with a lovely letter to the Holy Virgin from Ignatius, "disciple of that John of yours." Trajan is personally present throughout. First in Antioch, where he orders Ignatius to be sent to Rome in chains. When the prisoner arrives in Rome, the emperor too is on hand to conduct the interrogation (recorded by Jacobus in dialogue), to order diabolical tortures and to pronounce the death sentence. Finally, Trajan personally presides in the circus, where the lions smother the holy man but do not touch his flesh. The emperor is amazed and grants that the Christians may take the body away and give it a solemn burial. Next Pliny's letter arrives, and Trajan "regretted what he had inflicted upon Ignatius and commanded that [henceforward] no Christian should be investigated; only if one happened to come forward, should he be punished." A quasi-conversion has thus been effected, and Jacobus is ready to handle Trajan's salvation.

The place in the *Legenda aurea*, where Trajan's salvation had to be discussed by necessity was the life of the sainted Pope Gregory I (590-604).³⁹ Trajan is in a frantic hurry to ride out for some war or other, when he is stopped by a widow in tears, who demands justice

³⁸ *Legenda aurea*, ed. Graesse cit. 155-8: "...ergo beatus Ignatius ... Trajano imperatori, qui coepit anno Domini C, de victoria redeunti et Christianis omnibus mortem minanti occurrit et libere se Christianum esse asseruit. ... Ubi sic dicit: ... O salutare bestias, quae praeparantur mihi, quando venient, quando emittentur, quando iis licebit carnibus meis frui? Invitabo eas ad devorationem meam et deprecabor, ne forte, ut in nonnullis fecerunt, timeant contingere corpus meum, quin immo et si cunctabuntur, ego vim faciam, ego me ingeram. [A paraphrase of St. Ignatius' letter to the Romans, para. 5, which Jacobus had found in Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 3.36] ... Cui Trajanus: sacrificia diis meis et sacerdotum omnium princeps eris. ... Tunc sanctus Ignatius coepit leones provocare, ut ad se devorandum accederent."

³⁹ *Legenda aurea* cit., ch. 46.10 (12 March). In the nineteenth century Gregory I himself was occasionally provided with an outrageous and quite mistaken mythical identity. The myth of Oedipus was refashioned in the Middle Ages in the tale of Gregory (Gregorius a Lapide, Gregor vom Stein), fruit of the incest between two orphaned youths, brother and sister, of a princely house of Aquitaine. Unknowingly Gregory later marries his mother. After due expiation God calls him to the papal office, and after his death he is sainted. The tale circulated widely in a number of versions in several languages; the best known perhaps is Hartmann von Aue's *Gregorius*. A French *vita* was published by Victor Luzarche as *Vie du Pape Grégoire le Grand. Légende française* (Tours 1857). The tale's hero had been given a typical name of popes; Luzarche's identification with Gregory I, the Great, was entirely uncalled for. As far as I can see, the epithet 'the Great' does not occur in any medieval version. But Luzarche's identification was repeated in a footnote by Arturo Graf in his *Roma nella memoria* cit., 505, and even induced the Library of Congress *National Union Catalogue. Pre-1956 Imprints* to list Luzarche's edition and similar material under 'Gregorius I, the Great, Saint, Pope.'

for the loss of her murdered son. His promise to deal with the matter after his return does not satisfy the widow. What if he were not to return alive? "Thereupon Trajan was moved by pity; he alighted from his horse and on the spot avenged the blood of the innocent youth." That story obviously called for another. "It is also said," continues Jacobus with a note of reserve as he relates that the youth was the victim of an accident caused by none other than a reckless son of Trajan's. The emperor hands him over to the widow as a substitute for the one she had lost, and also pays her ample compensation.

This is the story Pope Gregory remembers one day as he is walking across the forum of Trajan. He is moved by Trajan's compassion and when he comes to St. Peter's basilica, "he shed bitter tears on account of Trajan's fault. And he received an answer from Heaven: Mark me; I have granted your request and excused Trajan from the everlasting punishment; you ought to watch carefully, however, lest you pray [again] for some condemned soul." Jacobus knew he had to tread cautiously. He next inserted an often quoted phrase by John of Damascus (d. c.750). Provided this is not a later interpolation, John is the earliest-known source to assert Trajan's salvation on account of Gregory's prayer. Jacobus also refers to Johannes Diaconus (824-c.882), whose *Vita* of St. Gregory introduced the tale of the widow to supply Gregory with a motive for his intercession.⁴⁰ If the conflicting tendencies of Trajan's historical record could thus be harmonized by virtue of Gregory's pity and God's mercy, the theological problems were more difficult to solve, and Jacobus was content to present them indirectly. As a pagan living in the Christian era, Trajan was automatically consigned to Hell; could he be extracted from there and transferred to Paradise? Indeed, was it legitimate for a saint to even pray for a damned soul? Like Johannes Diaconus before him, Jacobus apparently wondered whether he could circumvent this last difficulty by having Gregory weep for Trajan rather than pray for him. But Jacobus also mentioned other opinions

⁴⁰ Roberto Paribeni, *Optimus Princeps: saggio sulla storia e sui tempi dell'imperatore Traiano* (New York 1975, original ed. Messina 1926-27) II 312-16. Paribeni reports later efforts to identify the precise spot, where Gregory was suddenly reminded of Trajan. He also mentions another tale, which reflects the secular spirit of a subsequent age. According to Johann Christian von Engel, *Commentatio de expeditionibus Traiani ad Danubium* (Vienna 1794) 214, Francis I of France, a great admirer of Trajan, wished to study the construction of the famous bridge that Trajan had built across the Danube at Drobeta. After lengthy excuses Sultan Suleiman I permitted the extraction of a wooden stake from the water. It was found to be petrified for up to three quarters of an inch.

that tried in various ways to limit the extent of grace accorded to the pagan emperor. His own preference, apparently, was to believe, like Thomas Aquinas and afterwards Dante,⁴¹ that Trajan had been granted another lease of terrestrial existence, now as a Christian. Following Gregory's intercession, he was called back to live and die in the Lord and go to Heaven. Trajan's salvation was a test case for a quandary of much larger proportions that continued to fire the historical as well as the theological imagination, especially in the age of Renaissance humanism.⁴²

When Trajan was perceived to be a Christian, he was not the only Roman emperor who had been converted to the new faith. Trajan's more illustrious counterpart, by medieval standards, was Constantine the Great (ruled 306-37). Constantine's conversion was plainly historical. Its importance can be appreciated without recourse to miracles. No one could ignore that he had been baptized as an adult and that according to his own testimony his endorsement of Christianity was connected with the outcome of a crucial battle. His victory over the usurper Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge near Rome (312) left him the sole emperor in the West. It also prepared the way for an equally unchallenged control of the East and the subsequent transfer of the imperial capital from Rome to Constantinople. Beyond that the Christian authors to whom Jacobus and his like had access also reported that Constantine put to death his son Crispus and his wife, Fausta. These murders normally were reported without offering any justification. It is unlikely that Jacobus was totally unaware of them; yet he never so much as mentioned them. Constantine was not a saint in the Roman calendar; the judgement of his actions, however perplexing, could be left to God. On the other hand, Constantine's conversion and his Christianization of the Roman Empire could not be ignored. In the historical experience of medieval Christians they presented a turning point, second in importance only to Christ's earthly life.

It is here that Constantine's case differs noticeably from that of Trajan. The tradition, of which the *Legenda aurea* is representative, could easily have managed without Trajan. As Pope Gregory had scores of miracles to his credit, the tale of Trajan's salvation might

⁴¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* III Suppl. q.71 a.5. Dante, *Commedia* Purgatorio 10.73-8, Paradiso 20.106-17.

⁴² See Appendix I.

have been dispensed with. Jacobus included it because it was too good to be ignored, but then felt in duty bound to reconcile the edifying legend with some unsavory historical facts. Constantine presented a similar problem; his *historia*, like Trajan's, was not a good *vitae magistra*. But since it was so crucial, it had to be edited in such a way as to teach a wholesome moral lesson. In this case *fabula* proved indispensable rather than merely desirable. It was needed to retouch Constantine's biography, to reduce it to the linear logic required to set an *exemplum*. Yet, since Constantine was essential, his legend was constantly repeated and blossomed forth in a rich variety of versions. Far from remedying the apparent lack of logic in the historical events, as *fabula* was expected to do, she only added to the confusion.

To begin with, it would seem, Jacobus opted for an easy way to get around this confusion, perhaps as much for his own sake as for that of his readers. Early on in the *Legenda aurea*, on reaching the Feast of St. Silvester (31 December; ch. 12), he simply decided on paraphrasing one elaborate version of the legend that, thanks to Constantine, had formed around the scarce historical facts known about Pope Silvester I (reigned 314-35). The source he used is the *Actus Silvestri*, which had been compiled in Rome around 460 and remained popular throughout the Middle Ages; well over three hundred manuscripts are known to exist.⁴³ An even wider circulation was ensured by the impact the legend had on such standard works as the *Liber pontificalis*, Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum historiale* and, of course, the *Legenda aurea*. In Jacobus' dramatic account replete with dialogue, Constantine soon comes to occupy the centre of the stage and he remains an active participant when the focus shifts back to Silvester. Constantine's persecution of the Christians causes the newly elected pope to leave Rome and take refuge on Mount Siraptis (Soracte), while the emperor himself is struck by divine punishment in the form of incurable leprosy. To effect a cure at all cost, the pagan priests advise him to bathe in the blood, still warm, of three thousand boys. But when the children are assembled for slaughter, Constantine is moved by the anguished cries and the dishevelled hair of their mothers. He stands up in his chariot and delivers a fine speech culminating in the memorable line: "*dignitas Romani populi de fonte*

⁴³ Wilhelm Levison, "Konstantinische Schenkung und Silvester-Legende" *Miscellanea Francesco Ehrle* (Rome 1924) II 159-247. Arturo Graf, *Roma nella memoria e nelle immaginazioni del Medio Evo*, second ed. (Turin 1915) 405-63. Erich Caspar, *Geschichte des Papsttums von den Anfängen bis zur Höhe der Weltherrschaft* (Tübingen 1930 -) I 115-30.

nascitur pietatis."⁴⁴ The boys are returned to their mothers, and the emperor's act of clemency is just as sure to produce its due reward as previously his cruel persecution. In a dream he is visited by two emissaries of Jesus Christ, who advise him to recall Silvester from his hiding place. The pope would guide him to a pool that would cure his leprosy three days after he had bathed in it. Silvester is fetched and arrives, eager for martyrdom. But when he learns of Constantine's dream, he produces the portraits of Saints Peter and Paul, whom the emperor recognizes as his night-time visitors. The Christians are freed from their jails, and Constantine is catechized, baptized and, of course, cured. On each of seven days following his baptism, the emperor promulgates a new law in favour of Christianity. The law of the seventh day institutes the ecclesiastical tithe, while on the following, eighth day Constantine lays the foundations for a new basilica of St. Peter. Jacobus had copied the account of these sweeping measures from the *Actus Silvestri*; beside them, the long list of Constantine's authentic benefactions, which is preserved in the *Liber Pontificalis*, looks paltry.⁴⁵ On the fourth day, for example, Jacobus had Constantine decree that "just as the emperor heads Rome, so shall the Roman pontiff be recognized as the head of all bishops." While following the *Actus Silvestri*, Jacobus did not, however, make use of the yet more extravagant assessment of Constantine's generosity towards the bishop of Rome, which was contained in the notorious *Donatio Constantini*.

The memorable events that happened in Rome became known to Constantine's mother, Helena (who is recognized as a saint in East and West alike, whereas her son was never admitted to the Roman calendar). Historical sources had proclaimed her a native of Bithynia in Asia Minor — which may have inspired the tradition accepted by Jacobus⁴⁶ that has her reside in Bethany near Jerusalem. And why would she live in Jerusalem, if she were not a Jewess? Helena writes to her son, approving his defection from idolatry, but deploring his allegiance to the false Messiah. They agree on a theological debate to resolve the divergence of their faiths. Helena arrives with 161 Jewish doctors, while two learned pagans are chosen to serve as judges.

⁴⁴ The expression is taken up by Suger of Saint-Denis in his life of Louis VII, and by Dante in his *Monarchia* 2.5 and *Epistolae* 5.3; cf Gustavo Vinay's ed. of the *Monarchia* (Florence 1950) 134f., 294.

⁴⁵ *Le Liber Pontificalis*, ed. L. Duchesne (Paris 1886-92) I 170-201.

⁴⁶ The following refers to the latter part of the *Legenda aurea* text on St. Silvester, ch. 12.

Following the *Actus Silvestri*, Jacobus gives their names: Crato and Zenophilus. Then he offers an extensive report of the arguments and counter-arguments. One by one, eleven leading Jewish scholars rise to present traditional objections to the Christian faith, and each in turn is discomfited by Silvester. The last Jew, Zambri by name, resorts to the magic "name of the all-powerful God", a secret known only to him. This he whispers into the ear of a ferocious bull, which can hardly be contained by a hundred strong men. The bull's eyes protrude and he drops dead. But Silvester is not to be outdone; he brings the bull back to life in the name of Jesus Christ and returns him to his herd, a reformed and gentle creature. "Herewith the queen, the Jews, the judges and all others were won over to the faith."

In his text on St. Silvester, Jacobus had given free rein to *fabula*, but not for long could he avoid sobering second thoughts. As he prepared to deal with the Feast of the Invention of the Holy Cross (3 May, ch. 68), Constantine the Great and St. Helena again came into focus. Recent analysis of the historical records has shown that it was indeed during the reign of Constantine that the true cross of Christ, or whatever was left of it or presumed to be it, was discovered in Jerusalem. By the end of the fourth century fragments and splinters of the holy wood began to be exhibited throughout Christendom. At the same time a famous legend came into existence, in which Helena is the principal character. Actually, that she visited Jerusalem among the earliest pilgrims to travel thither from the West and busied herself with the building of churches is historical fact. That she excavated the cross and therewith instituted devotional archaeology is legend. Nevertheless, the cross now existed. Constantine had seen it in a visionary dream; now it was solid matter, tangible reality. Soon it would be the prime symbol of Christianity anywhere. In 614 the Sassanid ruler of Persia, Chosroes II, stormed and sacked Jerusalem and sent the true cross home to his Nestorian queen Meryem. But in 630 Emperor Heraclius I brought it triumphantly back to the liberated city. It disappeared again, and this time for good, after Saladin's conquest of the Holy City in 1187. Meanwhile the legend of the

Invention of the Cross marched on in several substantially different versions.⁴⁷

The legend of the Holy Cross is well known. It does not of itself cast much light on the medieval assessments of Constantine; its strength lies in its mystical depth. It spans the traditional 5500 years⁴⁸ from the Creation to the crucifixion of Christ. The tree of Eden, cause of Adam's fall, is identical with the tree of Christ's cross, cause of mankind's redemption. Amid many vicissitudes and transformations, that unique tree becomes connected with Adam's grave, Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, the mountain tops of Lebanon, the pool of Bethesda, and so on. Jacobus a Voragine could have picked one version of the legend, as he did in the case of the Silvester, and stuck to it. Instead he cited a considerable variety of sources — no less than ten are identified by name⁴⁹ — and dwelled on points in which they contradicted each other. He tackled some of the problems, but his Latin diction, never a model of clarity, may on this occasion mirror his sense of confusion as much as his artless handling of grammar. Although Constantine's own role in the story is marginal, Jacobus' critical review of the legend inevitably called for a new examination of some crucial turns in the emperor's life.

These were some of the questions that Jacobus felt obliged to pose. Could the conflicting reports about Constantine's baptism be reconciled by assuming that two different christenings had occurred? Was the famous message "*In hoc signo vinces*" part of a vision at the eve of Constantine's victory on the river Danube [over the Goths, 332],

⁴⁷ Johannes Straubinger, *Die Kreuzauffindungslegende* (Paderborn 1912). Jan Willem Drijvers, *Helena Augusta. The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of Her Finding of the True Cross* (Leiden 1992). This is an excellent book, whose scope closely resembles the aims and the approach of this present study. I regret that Drijvers' book was not available when I was preparing my own.

⁴⁸ Jacobus, in his critical mood, felt obliged to add that the actual number of years was only 5199.

⁴⁹ [Eusebius], *Historia ecclesiastica*; Jerome, *Chronica* (really a Latin translation of the second part of Eusebius' *Historia ecclesiastica*, with a continuation); Ambrose, *De obitu Theodosii* (c. 395: the first source to mention Helena's role in the discovery of the Cross, and the one most often mentioned by Jacobus); [Cassiodorus], *Historia tripartita*; Gregory of Tours, "Gesta pontificum Romanorum" i.e. *Liber Pontificalis*; [Petrus Comestor], *Historia scholastica*; Johannes Beletus; *Historia de inventione Crucis*; and *Actus Silvestri* (attributed to Eusebius). Further, among other vague references there is a "*hystoria Graecorum licet apocrypha*" and "*ultramarinae hystoriae*," also said to be unreliable.

after which he was baptized by one Eusebius, either the pope⁵⁰ or the bishop of Caesarea? Perhaps the victor of the Danube was not the famous Constantine, who was later baptized by Silvester, but his father, whose name was also Constantine [really Constantius]. Or was it the other way round? Cassiodorus and others assigned the vision of the cross and the heavenly voice proclaiming "*Constantine, in hoc vinces*" to the victory over Maxentius. The story of Constantine's baptism by Silvester was also suspect. According to Ambrose, Cassiodorus and Jerome, the emperor deferred his baptism to the very end of his life, because he wanted it to take place in the river Jordan. What was certain, though, was that he became a Christian during Silvester's pontificate. The "*legenda Sancti Silvestri*" [i.e. the *Actus Silvestri*], which was read aloud in the churches, was doubtful in many points. More worthy of trust was the "*hystoria de inventione sanctae crucis*," which could be found in ecclesiastical histories and was also in agreement with the universal chronicles.⁵¹

According to Ambrose, the Empress Helena had started her career as a stable-girl; according to others, she was the daughter of the king

⁵⁰ A Greek named Eusebius is indeed listed as pope from April to August 309/10. It is accepted today that Constantine was baptized by an Arian bishop named Eusebius shortly before his death in Nicomedia, 337. The latter is not identical with Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, c.264/5-337/41). Jacobus a Voragine does not show any awareness of the fact that Constantine's vision and the battle on the Milvian Bridge (312) preceded the pontificate of Silvester I (314-35).

⁵¹ *Legenda aurea* cit., ed. Graesse, 305f.: [Constantine won his victory on the Danube] "*Qui in Christum perfecte tunc credidit et ab Eusebio papa vel, secundum quosdam libros, a Caesariensi episcopo sacrum baptismum suscepit. Sed in hac hystoria multa ponuntur, quibus contradicit hystoria tripartita et ecclesiastica et vita sancti Silvestri et gesta pontificum Romanorum. Secundum quosdam non fuit iste Constantinus imperator, qui a beato Silvestro papa fuit baptizatus et ad fidem conversus, sicut aliquae hystoriae videntur innuere, sed fuit Constantinus pater ipsius Constantini, sicut in aliquibus hystoriis invenitur. Ille enim Constantinus alio modo ad fidem venit, sicut in hystoria sancti Silvestri legitur, nec ab Eusebio, sed a Silvestro baptizatus fuisse narratur. Mortuo tamen ipso Constantino Constantinus memor victoriae patris, quam virtute sanctae crucis habuerat, Helenam matrem suam Hierosolimam pro ipsa cruce inveniunda transmisit. ... [Ibid. 306f.: After the victory over Maxentius] Sicut legitur in quadam chronica satis authentica, Constantinus tunc perfecte non credidit nec tunc sacrum baptismum suscepit, sed aliquanto temporis interjecto visionem illam Petri et Pauli vidit et sacro baptismate per Silvestrum papam renatus et a lepra mundatus in Christum deinceps perfecte credidit et sic matrem Helenam Hierosolimam misit, ut crucem domini requireret. Ambrosius tamen in epistola de obitu Theodosii et hystoria tripartita dicunt, quod in ultimis constitutus baptismum suscepit, baptismum differens, ut posset in Jordanis flumine baptizari. Hoc idem dicit Hieronymus in chronica. Certum autem est, quod sub Silvestro papa christianus effectus est, utrum autem baptismum distulit, in dubium vertitur, unde de illa legenda sancti Silvestri quo ad plura similiter dubitatur. Haec igitur hystoria de inventione sanctae crucis, quae in ecclesiasticis hystoriis invenitur, cui etiam consonant chronicae, videtur esse magis authentica quam illa, quae per ecclesias recitatur.*"

of the Britons or a native of Trier. At the request of her son, she goes to Jerusalem in search of the Holy Cross. This the Jews have well hidden, desirous as they always are, to conceal their knowledge of the fact that Christ was the Messiah. Eventually Helena finds the cross with the help of one Judas, who afterwards becomes a Christian and the “bishop” of Jerusalem. He was also said to be the nephew of the protomartyr St. Stephen, but Jacobus pointed out that this was chronologically impossible. Helena’s excavations on the hill of Golgatha bring to light, not one, but all three crosses. Jacobus reported two versions of the miracle required to identify the True Cross, but he also added that according to Ambrose it was recognized simply by the inscription Pilate had attached to it.

Jacobus knew very well that some sources were more authentic than others. Quite properly he tended to assume that the oldest ones — in this case Eusebius, Ambrose and Cassiodorus — were the best. Why did he, none the less, narrate the entire legend of Silvester in the first place (ch. 12) and then, several hundred pages later (ch. 68), review it amid a turmoil of confusion, doubt and, indeed, rejection? Are we looking here at two stages of his occupation with the material? Perhaps it was not until the Feast of the Invention of the Cross necessitated another examination of the activities of Constantine and Helena that he began to question the reliability of the Silvester legend, but could not bring himself to revise his earlier text. One must assume that Jacobus was aware of two levels of historical consciousness. To put it simply, historical scholarship was for the mind, whereas the homespun legends were for the heart. He saw no reason why they could not co-exist. In fact, being a spiritual writer as well as a responsible scholar, his task was to unite them in a solid marriage. In the case of Constantine this task proved unmanageable. All he could honestly do in the end was to share with the reader his own sense of perplexity. The least one can say for him is that he had recognized the problem. Two centuries later, in the age of Renaissance historiography, *fabula* still nodded defiantly at Platina’s treatment of the issues in his history of the popes. Wary of all miracles and of conflicts in his chronology, Platina quietly disposed of Constantine’s persecution of Christians and of his leprosy. He also separated the battle against Maxentius from Constantine’s baptism by Silvester, but against all odds he was not willing to sacrifice the latter. After all,

Constantine's baptistery in Rome was still extant.⁵² Platina's great successor among the historians of the papacy, Caesar Baronius, defended the *Actus Silvestri* to the hilt; all a scholar needed to be critically aware of was that the text of the *Actus* existed in different versions.⁵³ As late as 1693 a lesser scholar still tenaciously clung to the story of Constantine's leprosy, his miraculous recovery and his baptism by Silvester.⁵⁴

The assumption of familiar contact between Constantine and Silvester is not supported by historical evidence. As far as we know, Constantine's relations with Pope Silvester, and also with his predecessors in the see of Rome, were not conspicuous. But Jacobus a Voragine was a medieval cleric. He could hardly conceive of secular government wholly detached from religion. Moreover, in so far as he was writing history, it was, of course, ecclesiastical history. It is thus appropriate that holders of the papal office figure more prominently and frequently in his narrative than do secular rulers. So let us now turn to the popes.

III

Legends of the Popes

Among its many other virtues the *Legenda aurea* was ideally suited to become a kind of central repository for the legends of the popes. Jacobus dutifully reported many of the fine tales by which the annals of the papacy had been enriched at one time or another, until they presented an intricate *mélange* of tares and wheat, as Baronius was

⁵² Bartolomeo Sacchi called Il Platina (1421-81), *Liber de vita Christi ac omnium pontificum*, ed. G. Gaida (Città di Castello 1913-32) 50-58. When Onofrio Panvinio re-edited Platina's history, he preferred not to annotate the critical passage on Constantine's baptism (using the ed. Cologne 1568).

⁵³ Cesare Baronio (1538-1607), *Annales ecclesiastici*, ed. Antonio Pagi (Lucca 1738-59) IV 40-49 (ad annum 324).

⁵⁴ Giovanni Giustino Ciampini (1633-98), *De sacris aedificiis a Constantino Magno constructis* (Rome 1693) preface and chs. 1 and 2.

later to put it.⁵⁵ A brief survey will be useful for our understanding both of Jacobus' concerns and the outlook of his countless readers.

The Feast of the Eleven Thousand Virgins (21 October; chapter 158), commemorating a well-loved and unabashedly fanciful legend, provides the ideal setting for Pope Cyriacus, who never existed. To reach him, we must begin with the Virgins. A Latin inscription in Cologne, tentatively dated from the later fourth or early fifth century, records the martyrdom of certain unnamed virgins at an undetermined time.⁵⁶ By the time a first comprehensive version of the legend was recorded, c. 975, the leader of the holy maidens was widely known to be St. Ursula, daughter of a nameless British king. A second, fleshed-out version of the legend dates from the eleventh century and still enjoyed great popularity in the age of early printing. As the legend progressed, it was further embellished and enriched with new details, partly thanks to the patriotism of Geoffrey of Monmouth, whose *Historia Britonum* was completed by 1138.⁵⁷ For our purposes another cluster of additions, dating from about 1164, is particularly interesting, for it is here that Pope Cyriacus makes his first appearance. In Cologne new tombs continued to be discovered and new companions of St. Ursula, by no means all female, were identified. Theoderic, abbot of Deutz, reported that some of the newly found bones were brought across the Rhine to the church of his monastery. Fortunately it was found that they had been fitted with

⁵⁵ Cesare Baronio, *Annales ecclesiastici* (Antwerp 1597-1609) X 110 (ad annum 853): "*Ut zizania inter triticum seminata fixis radicibus tritici mentita specie altiori culmo consurgunt, sicut triticum messoris aequa falce metantur, et cum frumento in horrea recondantur ... ita fabularum abolito nomine receptae semel transeant in historiam, ut opus sit magno cribrario, qui magno labore a veris falsa et fabulas segreget ab historiis.*" This is followed by a check list of fables in ecclesiastical, and especially papal, history. The classic collection of this material is Johann Joseph Ignaz von Döllinger, *Die Papst-Fabeln des Mittelalters. Ein Beitrag zur Kirchengeschichte*, second ed. by J. Friedrich (Stuttgart 1890). The work was first published in 1863.

⁵⁶ Wilhelm Levison, *Das Werden der Ursulalegende* (Cologne 1928) 3f., 23 and passim for what follows here. Among the appendixes is Levison's ed. of the *Passio Ursulae*, the first version of the legend. Döllinger, *Die Papst-Fabeln* cit. 53-57.

⁵⁷ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Britonum* 5.15-16, ed. J.A. Giles (London 1844, repr. 1967) 91-93. This version is quite different and distinctly insular; neither Cologne nor Rome nor a pope are mentioned. The English king Dionotus assembles the virgins, including his own daughter Ursula, and sends them off across the Channel at the request of Conanus, who needs wives for his Breton warriors and wants to keep the race pure. The fleet goes astray and the virgins are massacred by Guanius, king of the Huns, and Melga, king of the Picts, who had been set in motion by the Emperor Gratian. Cf. J.S.P. Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain* (Berkeley 1950, repr. 1974) 236-40.

identification tags. His reports greatly stirred St. Elisabeth of Schönaue, a nun already famous for her visionary gift. As she concerned herself most earnestly with the many problems presented by the old story and the new discoveries, visions were triggered in her mind that offered imaginative solutions and also added many enlightening details to what had been known so far. Pope Cyriacus was a major beneficiary of her clarifications.⁵⁸ The chroniclers Vincent of Beauvais and Martinus Polonus ensured even wider circulation, and so did, above all, the *Legenda aurea*. A huge and colourful reliquary painted by Hans Memling in 1489, now in Bruges,⁵⁹ stands out among the countless illustrations.

Jacobus tells the tale as follows. Ursula, the daughter of a British king called Nothus or Maurus, leaves home to win a respite from an unwelcome suitor. She is accompanied by ten noble maidens, each leading a train of one thousand other virgins, as does Ursula herself. Ursula's aunt, the queen of Sicily, also joins and the company keeps growing as it proceeds. Several bishops, Ursula's fiancé and the daughter of the king of Constantinople, all await their turn to join. When Ursula reaches Cologne, an angel directs her to Rome, where she is joyously received by Pope Cyriacus, who is himself British. The impending martyrdom of the eleven thousand virgins is revealed to him in his sleep and he immediately resolves to join them. All travel back to Cologne, where each and every one is martyred by the Huns, who have meanwhile occupied the city.

The legend, as reported by Jacobus, introduces Cyriacus as the nineteenth pope after St. Peter and correspondingly dates the carnage of Cologne to the year 238. Thoughtfully, the legend also takes care of the fact that no Pope Cyriacus is found on the traditional lists of the Roman pontiffs and in the sixth-century *Liber pontificalis*. When Ursula appears in Rome, Cyriacus has been pope for a year and eleven weeks. To be free to accompany the virgins, he must lay down his papal office, and he does so in a public assembly. All present, and especially his cardinals, protest against this action, but Cyriacus persists and ordains as his successor one Ametus (on the list of popes the corresponding incumbent is called Anterus). Afterwards the Roman clergy show their disapproval of Cyriacus by removing his

⁵⁸ *Die Visionen der hl. Elisabeth und die Schriften der Aebte Ekbert und Emecho von Schönaue*, ed. F.W.E. Roth (Brno 1884) 122-38: "Liber revelationum Elisabeth de sacro exercitu virginum Coloniensium."

⁵⁹ Maur Guillaume-Linephy, *La Châsse de Sainte-Ursule de Hans Memling* (Brussels 1958).

name from the list (a remarkable explanation first revealed to St. Elisabeth of Schönaue).

Jacobus was not impelled to notice the absurdity of this explanation. Cyriacus, whose pontificate would thus have been suppressed, had clearly been exonerated for his desertion of the papal see by the divine seal of holy martyrdom. How could the Roman clergy ignore that he had done God's will and deprive the list of popes of another saint? In fact, Jacobus' contemporary, the chronicler Martinus Polonus (d. 1278) mentions another reason frequently given for Cyriacus' resignation: rather than joining the virgins in martyrdom, the pope would have taken his pleasure with them.⁶⁰ Some decades after Jacobus and Martinus Polonus had composed their works, this precedent of a papal resignation obtained special relevance through the controversial abdication of Pope Celestine V, which occurred in 1294. Until the sixteenth century the fictional Cyriacus continued to figure in the weighty arguments of canonists and theologians who examined the question whether a pope could relinquish his office. While the *Legenda aurea* was obviously not the place to do likewise, Jacobus did end this tale with one of his intermittent displays of historical acumen. He discovered a glaring anachronism in the fact that by the middle of the third century there existed neither a kingdom of Sicily nor one of Constantinople. Following "some other chronicle," he assigned the martyrdom of the virgins to the year of 452 and the reign of Emperor Marcianus, who did then indeed fight the Huns. Unfortunately this suggestion cannot redeem the garbled notion of kingdoms in Sicily and Constantinople, nor does it come close to the probable date of the event recorded in the authentic Cologne inscription. It also — and Jacobus utterly fails to point this out — ruins all claims to the existence, two centuries earlier, of a Pope Cyriacus, "nineteenth among the successors of St. Peter." But this did not seem to bother anyone — at least not until the sixteenth century, when Cyriacus was quietly laid to rest by Platina and Baronius. He was resuscitated, though, in the following century by the Cologne Jesuit Hermann Crombach, who succeeded in closing

⁶⁰ The chronicler himself rejects this accusation; see Martinus Polonus (of Troppau), *Chronicon pontificalium et imperatorum*, ed. Ludwig Weiland, MGH SS 22 (Hannover 1872) 413: "*Credebant enim plerique eum non propter devocionem sed propter delectamenta virginum papatum dimisisse, cum tum virgo existens cum virginibus martirio fuit coronatus.*"

his mind to all troublesome doubts when filling 1155 folio pages with his devout account of Ursula and her companions.⁶¹

Pope Marcellinus is identified in the six-century *Liber pontificalis*⁶² with three precise indications, none of which can be corroborated from other sources. The length of his pontificate (296-304) is indicated in terms of years, months and days; he is said to be from Rome, the son of one Projectus; and after his martyrdom he is said to have been buried by the priest Marcellus in the cemetery of Priscilla on the via Salaria. The *Liber pontificalis* also states that despite his martyr's death at the height of Diocletian's persecution, Marcellinus had at one time succumbed and worshipped the pagan gods, as requested by the renewed anti-Christian legislation. Details about the pope's apostasy are given in the Acts of a purported Council of Sinuessa (on the border of Lazio and Campania), a document concocted at the beginning of the sixth century and thus roughly contemporary with the *Liber pontificalis*. The story, as it eventually emerged from this material, is reported in the *Legenda aurea*. After various tortures and in fear of death, Marcellinus has offered the gods two grains of incense. But the weakness of the head only causes the members to rally their strength. The faithful protest and the bishops gather for the alleged council. Mirroring the concerns of a much later period, they tell Marcellinus: "God forbid that the supreme pontiff be subject to other men's judgement; it is you that must review your case and pronounce your verdict with your own voice."⁶³ Marcellinus is struck with remorse and dismisses himself from the papal office. The crowd, however, promptly re-elects him — a step that causes the persecutors to renew their furies. Before his execution Marcellinus declares himself unworthy of a Christian burial and hurls the ban against anyone who would have the audacity to bury him. As a result his body remains for thirty-five days without interment. Then St. Peter steps in and orders the new pope, Marcellus, to carry his predecessor to the grave.

The tale of Pope Marcellinus certainly begs to be examined in the light of historical facts. That at the height of Diocletian's persecution

⁶¹ Hermann Crombach, *Vita et martyrium S. Ursulae* (Cologne 1647) esp. 118-20.

⁶² *Liber pontificalis*, ed. Duchesne cit. I 162-63.

⁶³ Jacobus a Voragine, *Legenda aurea*, ed. Graesse cit., ch. 60, 26 April: "*Ad quem illi: absit ut summus pontifex ab aliquo judicetur, sed tu in te collige causam tuam et proprio ore te dijudica.*"

the bishop of Rome should have been forced to sacrifice and eventually been executed is consistent with the imperial edicts and entirely plausible. The *Liber pontificalis* can probably be trusted when it states that — three centuries later — the precise location of his tomb was well known. That Marcellinus was accused of temporary apostasy is confirmed by Augustine's reply to the Donatist Petilianus.⁶⁴ That Marcellinus' name is missing on some of the oldest lists of popes could indeed be the result of a *damnatio memoriae* due to his apostasy. In this case absence from the lists would corroborate the reported facts and speak for Marcellinus' existence, whereas in the case of Pope Cyriacus it confirmed non-existence. One problem posed by the non-existent Cyriacus, however, also applies to Marcellinus. If indeed he died as a holy martyr, would not this fact outweigh his earlier apostasy in the judgement of those who composed the papal lists? Moreover, historical knowledge of Pope Marcellus rests only on marginally firmer ground than that of his predecessor Marcellinus; even the possibility that the two similar names refer to one and the same person cannot be wholly excluded.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the two cases of Cyriacus and Marcellinus are quite different. Cyriacus is a pure product of medieval fantasy. The tale of Ursula's visit to Rome and the pope's departure with her for Cologne and the crown of martyrdom lacks every historical foundation. It can in no way be understood as an attempt to clarify the obscure records of actual events. Marcellinus' story, on the other hand, had to be substantially true to anyone who believed the Sinuessa Acts to be authentic, and as late as the sixteenth century both Platina and Baronius continued to hold that they were.⁶⁶ So did evidently Jacobus a Voragine, and in this case the historian in him can hardly be accused of professional negligence. Discarding Sinuessa, one may perhaps conclude that Marcellinus' lapse and martyrdom are not incompatible and that both, at any rate, are more likely to have occurred than his resignation and re-elevation to the papal office.

⁶⁴ Augustine, *Contra litteras Petiliani* 2.202, 208 (PL 43.323,328).

⁶⁵ For a good summary of the problems associated with Marcellinus and Marcellus see Caspar, *Geschichte des Papsttums* cit. I 95-101. Caspar points out that those lists which mention Marcellus assign to his pontificate the nine years otherwise reserved for that of Marcellinus.

⁶⁶ Baronius in his *Annales* (ed. cit. Lucca 1738-59) reprints the Sinuessa acts (III 360-62) and after much pondering declines to reject their authenticity. A century later Bossuet spoke of a general agreement among scholars that they were a forgery; see Jacques Bénigne Bossuet, *Oeuvres complètes* VII (Bar-le-Duc 1863) 418.

Pope Sylvester I (314-35) has been discussed amid the crop of legends reaped from the actions of Emperor Constantine the Great. The next station in our chronological survey of papal legends is reached with Liberius, pope from 352 to 366, and his sometime opponent Felix II, now counted as an anti-pope. A particularly rich and interesting documentation is available for the history of these years, part of which is subject to considerable controversy.⁶⁷ The complexities need not concern us, however. The tug-of-war between *historia* and *fabula* occurring in the subsequent perception of these events was already pointed out by Döllinger.⁶⁸ *Fabula* brought about a far-reaching reversal of the historical roles. It portrayed Felix II, who was really an usurper of the papal office, as a pillar of righteousness and Catholic orthodoxy and even as a sainted martyr, whereas Liberius had his reputation ruined until he was partially rehabilitated in the eighteenth century and more fully in the twentieth.

This is the account given by the *Legenda aurea* of St. Felix the Pope (ch. 103, 29 July). Pope Liberius refuses to fall in with the Arian heresy and is therefore exiled by the Emperor Constantius. In Liberius' place and with his full approval, the entire Roman clergy elects Felix II. The new pope convenes a council and before the assembled bishops condemns Constantius as an Arian heretic. The enraged emperor deposes Felix and recalls Liberius on condition that he breaks rank with the Catholics. Weary of his exile, Liberius accepts and "embraces the wickedness of the heretics" to the point of raising no objections when a great many Catholic clerics are killed. Felix too, who after his summary dismissal retired to his villa, is beheaded and thus earns the martyr's crown around the year 340.

In keeping with his negative view of Liberius, Jacobus a Voragine suspected that he might have perpetrated more misdeeds. The legend of St. Hilary of Poitiers (ch. 17, 13 January) seems particularly crude to the modern reader of the *Legenda aurea*. St. Hilary has already performed such miracles as sending his own wife and young daughter to Heaven, using prayers as a tool of dispatch, when the heretical Pope Leo invites all bishops to a council but deliberately leaves out Hilary. When the saint appears uninvited, an altercation develops between him and the pope. Eventually, with dire threats on his lips, Leo leaves to retire to the privy, and Hilary sees to it that he dies of

⁶⁷ For a good summary see Caspar, *Geschichte des Papsttums* cit. I 166-95.

⁶⁸ Döllinger, *Die Papst-Fabeln des Mittelalters* cit. 126-45.

dysentery then and there.⁶⁹ The tale called for critical scrutiny, especially since Jacobus realized that the first pope named Leo was not to occur until a century later. Smartly Jacobus suggested that unless one were to assume the existence of an unrecorded anti-pope, Leo must be another name for Pope Liberius, who was indeed Hilary's contemporary. For good measure, he also expressed his doubts about the mentioned circumstances of the pope's demise since the most reliable chronicles did not refer to them.

Modern analysis presents a very different picture of the conflict between Pope Liberius and his opponent on the imperial throne. Constantius was not only a committed Arian, but also a forceful practitioner of Caesaropapism, whereas the Roman bishop emerges as a man of peace and moderate abilities, firm in his Catholic conviction but wavering and often ineffectual in his measures. In 353, the second year of Liberius' pontificate, the emperor was at Arles and used a synod of bishops to push for a new condemnation of Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria, the stalwart defender of the Catholic position. The new pope sent legates who, without their master's authorization, signed the document of censure. Liberius cautiously disowned them and in 355, when summoned to the emperor's court at Milan, he found the strength to choose exile rather than submission. While he was taken away to Thrace, Constantius attempted to have Felix, the senior deacon of the Roman church, recognized as pope. At first he faced unanimous opposition from the Roman clergy and people, but eventually attrition helped the emperor's cause. Felix ceased to protest when being addressed as bishop of Rome, and Liberius, weary of his exile, expressed what amounted to a qualified approval of the Arian position. In 358 he was permitted to return to Rome, and thus a showdown between him and Felix was rendered inevitable — not, it seems, because of dogmatic conflict, but on account of the monarchic principle of church government that Rome would never cease to uphold. Popular support decided the issue in favour of Liberius. Felix retired and died in 365 at his villa in Portus, while Liberius remained to deal, as best he could, with a series of new challenges: the succession of Emperor Julian (361) and his restoration of the pagan state cult, subsequently a new division of the empire and the Arianism still prevailing in Constantinople.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ The unsavory details are borrowed from a tradition about the death of Arius; cf. below p. 95, on Anastasius II.

⁷⁰ Caspar, *Geschichte des Papsttums* cit. I 166-95.

The reversal of the historical roles of Liberius and Felix was already well developed in the *Liber pontificalis*, which described the latter as an upright Catholic and a victim to his conviction, while the former is seen as an Arian and willing tool of the wicked Constantius. Subsequently, as later hands made additions to the *Liber pontificalis*, a short biography of Felix II, public censor of the emperor's heresy and a crowned martyr, was inserted between the chapters devoted to Pope Liberius and his successor, Pope Damasus. The interpolators were evidently not discouraged by the fact that in the preceding life of Liberius, Felix had been considered as a caretaker, who did not deserve separate treatment, and that he was said to have died peacefully.⁷¹ This glaring inconsistency was possibly due to a confusion with another Felix, the Roman martyr of that name, who was an early victim of Diocletian's persecution. However that may be, the groundwork was now in place for the legend of Pope Felix II, as it appears in the *Legenda aurea*.⁷²

The subsequent historiographical vicissitudes of Liberius and Felix would deserve a full account. Here we can only note that the ongoing controversy intensified in the Counter-Reformation. In 1582 Pope Gregory XIII appointed a congregation to find the true facts. Presently a skeleton was discovered beneath an altar of Sts. Cosmas and Damian, together with a stone slab inscribed "*Corpus S. Felicis Papae et Martyris, qui condemnavit Constantium*." This piece of irrefutable evidence disappeared again before long. But prior to its disappearance even the great Baronius had been persuaded to give up his earlier rejection of a Felix II, lawful pope and martyr. Later on, Bishop Bossuet criticized Baronius and others for an attempted whitewash of Liberius' lapse, which to him was real enough, although it could not derogate from the dignity of the papal office. The controversy ought

⁷¹ *Liber pontificalis*, ed. Duchesne cit. I 207-11, also introd. cxx-cxxvii. It may be noted that in the interpolated life Felix condemns Constantius as a heretic who "had been baptized a second time ... near Nicomedia by Eusebius, the bishop of of that city." It was Constantine the Great, of course, of whom two conflicting baptisms were reported in the sources, a legendary one in Rome and the authentic one at Nicomedia (see above pp. 80-83). The interpolators must have found it convenient to blame Constantius, the son, for the sins of his father.

⁷² The *Legenda aurea* cit., ch. 126, 30 August, does offer a separate record of Felix, the Roman presbyter, and his companion in martyrdom, Adautus, but that was hardly a reason for Jacobus to question the martyrdom of Pope Felix II. Also Jacobus' readers are left to their own resources, if they are to realise that in another reference to "Pope Felix" the *Legenda aurea* does not refer to the opponent of Liberius, but rather conflates Felix III (483-92), the supposed great-grandfather of Pope Gregory the Great, with Felix IV (526-30), the builder of the basilica of Sts. Cosmas and Damian; see ch. 143 on Sts. Cosmas and Damian, 27 September).

to have been settled in 1777, at the latest, with the authoritative account of Gaspare Saccarelli, but as late as 1790 Felix II, pope and martyred saint, found an eager defender, whose learned misrepresentation of the evidence was as thorough as it was fanciful.⁷³ In this case the reason for *fabula's* intervention and enduring success is not difficult to find. The true facts were altogether too complex and differentiated to spell out the sort of clear message that the Middle Ages felt entitled to expect from history. It was expedient to present the story in clear, antithetical terms, to match Catholic orthodoxy against Arian heresy, a true pope against an apostate. If Felix was a victim of the wicked Arians, Liberius had to be their creature. Or vice-versa; even Döllinger judged Felix harshly in view of the support he had received from the Arian camp.

In the further pursuit of *fabula's* contributions to the history of the popes we must take leave of Jacobus a Voragine. The papal legends which he included in his monumental work generally fall into two categories. Either they are products of unfettered imagination, stuck upon a body of historical fact, much as an adventurous boy might don the police chief's cap, or they are the result of well-intentioned meddling with historical evidence, so as to make it morally instructive or at least readily understandable, rather like grafting fruit-bearing twigs upon wild growth. Pope Cyriacus' association with St. Ursula and Pope Gregory's redemption of Trajan are examples of the fanciful, incongruous variety; Pope Silvester's christening of Constantine represents the meddling one. There is a third form of legendary manipulation, however, which is rarely found in the stories Jacobus related. In his account of Pope Marcellinus, he trusted the Acts of Sinuessa and lent expression to the political goal pursued with that forgery. No doubt he acted in good faith. Deliberate twisting, or outright fabrication, of the historical evidence, in order to establish precedents for contemporary political and legal claims, is a practice of which Jacobus is wholly innocent.

Pope Anastasius II (496-98) became the victim of remarks originally intended to remove the confusing complexity of the

⁷³ Apart from Döllinger, see Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, *Gallia orthodoxa sive vindiciae scholae Parisiensis totiusque cleri Gallici adversus nonnullos*, part 3, book 9, chs. 33f., in *Oeuvres* cit. VII 419-21; Gaspare Saccarelli, *Historia ecclesiastica per annos digesta* V (Rome 1777) 331-60; Paolantonio Paoli, *Di San Felice secondo papa e martire dissertazioni* (Rome 1790).

historical facts. As his legend progressed, he was first consigned to the fires of Hell and subsequently released, only to become engulfed in heated ecclesio-political debates. In the Middle Ages the thought of a pope worthy of Hell was far from shocking. To realize this, one only needs to look at uncounted representations of the Last Judgement in tympana and on frescos, which depict a bearer of the papal crown among the condemned souls. Dante went further and specifically identified several popes as inmates of Hell. Among the sinners eternally punished for heresy is Anastasius II, of whose name and fatal error the visiting poet is informed by an inscription on his tomb in the appropriate circle of Nether Hell.⁷⁴ Dante was simply drawing conclusions from a tradition which, although entirely misleading, was generally accepted in his time. In truth, Anastasius did no more than undertake a generous diplomatic overture towards the church of Constantinople. Unfortunately his steps could be seen by the Eastern schismatics as rapprochement in theological substance. After Anastasius' early death, his initiative led to divisions in Rome and to a damning insinuation in the *Liber pontificalis*. "He desired secretly" says the *Liber* "to reinstate [the heretic] Acacius and could not. He was struck dead by divine will."⁷⁵ The verdict gained adherents. Gratian's *Decretum* of Canon Law is blunt in establishing the causal connection: "He desired secretly to reinstate Acacius and could not. Because of this he was struck dead by divine will."⁷⁶ Writers who were less discreet than Dante, such as Martinus Polonus, even condemned Anastasius to the shameful manner of death that had been invented for Arius, the arch-heretic, and that the *Legenda aurea* had assigned to Pope Liberius alias Leo.⁷⁷ As late as the Renaissance, Pope Anastasius was left to suffer in Hell, but beginning with the sixteenth century the ominous sentence in the *Liber pontificalis* was subjected to — not always subtle — interpretations designed to effect his redemption. It remained for Döllinger, that nineteenth-century opponent of papal infallibility, to deal severely with the whitewashers. He preferred to see in Pope Anastasius a man of peace. Although he was driven by his desire to gratify millions of Christians in the East,

⁷⁴ Dante, *Inferno* 11.6-9.

⁷⁵ *Liber pontificalis*, ed. Duchesne cit. I 258-9. While himself a Catholic, Acacius, Patriarch of Constantinople, had extended recognition to some Monophysitic bishops. For this he had been anathematized by Anastasius' predecessor in Rome.

⁷⁶ *Corpus iuris canonici* dist. 19, c.9; cf. Caspar, *Geschichte des Papstums* cit. II 82-87.

⁷⁷ Cf. above p. 91f. Martinus Polonus, *Chronicon* cit., MGH SS 22.420.

he had never, said Döllinger, compromised the essentials of Catholic doctrine.⁷⁸

The tradition of Pope Honorius I (625-38) is marked by the same political concerns. Honorius' pontificate is a record of hard-working achievement. He meant well and gladly co-operated with the patriarchate of Constantinople in an effort to reconcile the Monophysite faction with the Catholic church. Common ground could be found by agreeing on a single operation, and consequently a single will, in Christ. This was the Monotheletist position, which Honorius in his letters embraced in no uncertain terms. Subsequently, Monotheletism was anathematized by the Sixth Oecumenical Council meeting in 680-81 at Constantinople, and Pope Honorius, whose letters were read before the assembly, had to be included in the condemnation. Reluctantly the papacy accepted the verdict. In fact, already Honorius' immediate successors had initiated an interpretative tradition that aimed to limit the impact of his statement and the extent of their own embarrassment. Beyond this, however, down to the fifteenth century the fact that a pope stood convicted of heresy by an oecumenical council nowhere caused unsufferable discomfort, nor led to a doctoring of the evidence. Not until the great reform councils of the fifteenth and the Reformation of the sixteenth centuries did Honorius' blunder become political dynamite. Platina made him out to be a resolute opponent of Monotheletism, and this upside-down interpretation was repeated by Onofrio Panvinio and Alonso Chacón. Albert Pigge ingeniously argued that Honorius' compromising letters were forged by the wicked Greeks, a theory to which Cardinals Hosius, Baronius and Bellarmine were glad to subscribe. The controversy heated up again in the nineteenth century, when the First Vatican Council debated papal infallibility. A critic of the proposed decree, Karl Joseph von Hefele, argued that Honorius' statements were undoubtedly authoritative and in fact heretical, but failed to express the pope's true understanding of the matter, which was orthodox. Others contradicted Hefele and found solace in the argument that Honorius was not speaking *ex cathedra*, when he seemed to support the heretical position.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Döllinger, *Die Papst-Fabeln* cit. 146-53.

⁷⁹ Georg Kreuzer, *Die Honoriusfrage im Mittelalter und in der Neuzeit* (Stuttgart 1975). Caspar, *Geschichte des Papsttums* cit. II 530-41, 601-9. Döllinger, *Die Papst-Fabeln* cit. 154-77).

Another conundrum of papal politicking is known, again, to readers of Dante. It concerns the fate of simple and saintly Pope Celestine V (July — December 1294). Dante shared in the general, but now disputed, contention that Celestine's successor, Boniface VIII, secured his own elevation to the papal throne by fraud.⁸⁰ Boniface was an expert in canon law and undeniably advised Celestine to resign. Dante clearly knew and believed a contemporary tale, attested by one Pietro Grassi, royal Neapolitan notary, that attributed Celestine's decision to an apparition. It was said that Christ himself, or at least a heavenly messenger, had counselled him to divest himself of the papal cloak. It is hardly surprising that contemporaries were tempted to identify the heavenly counsellor with the earthly one and to see behind the apparition the craft of the future Pope Boniface.⁸¹

IV

The Popess Joan

A classic case of the implantation of myth in the tissue of history is the tale of the Popess Joan. These are the principal features of her story as related by such widely read authors as Martinus Polonus — or perhaps an interpolator, who may have added it while copying Martinus' chronicle — and Giovanni Boccaccio.⁸² The girl Joan, born in Mainz, elopes with a young cleric to Athens or to England. Herself disguised as a cleric, she enrolls together with her friend in a course of study. Her lover dies, but she continues her studies with brilliant success and eventually moves to Rome, where she lectures

⁸⁰ Dante, *Inferno* 19.55-57; cf. 3.59f.

⁸¹ *Acta sanctorum Maii*, ed. G. Henschenius and D. Papebrochius, IV (Antwerp 1685) 523. For recent rehabilitations of Boniface see E. Dupré Theseider and P. Herde in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, ed. A.M. Ghisalberti (Rome 1960 —) 12.148 and 23.410.

⁸² Martinus Polonus, *Chronicon* cit., MGH SS 22.386-88, 428f.; also Ludwig Weiland in *Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichte* 12 (1874) 17-19, 469-73. The suspicion that Joan's story was an interpolation first occurred to Onofrio Panvinio and was taken up by Döllinger, *Die Papst-Fabeln* cit. 1-53, esp. 11f. Giovanni Boccaccio, *De claris mulieribus*, ch. 101, in *Tutte le opere*, ed. Vittore Branca et al. (Milan 1964-) X 414-16. The most comprehensive and scholarly treatment of Popess Joan fiction is Alain Boureau, *La Papesse Jeanne* (Paris 1988).

with great distinction. Her academic reputation is matched by her impeccable conduct. So, after the death of Leo IV in 855, she is elected pope and takes the name of John VIII. But eventually the devil, who has guided her to such heights, claims his prey. Joan becomes pregnant and, misjudging her time, gives birth on a public street while being carried in sacred procession from St. Peter's to the Lateran. She either dies on the spot or, later on, in a dungeon. One manuscript of Martinus Polonus has her do penance for many years, while her baby son eventually becomes bishop of Ostia.

For a full four centuries after the reported events even the best-informed chroniclers were entirely silent about the popess.⁸³ She surfaced for the first time in the middle of the thirteenth century in the Metz world chronicle attributed to the Dominican Jean de Mailly (d. c. 1260).⁸⁴ His account was taken over by a fellow-Dominican, Etienne de Bourbon (d. c. 1261), in his *De septem donis Spiritus Sancti*. While not yet giving a name to the female pope, the two Dominicans placed her pontificate around 1100. Martinus Polonus, also a Dominican, or his interpolator, had her adopt the name of Joannes Anglicus. Several other names were proposed in the fourteenth century, when the tale became widely diffused⁸⁵ and was being retold with many additional details. Of special interest are two particulars that were likely invented in Rome and would be appreciated, above all, by those familiar with papal ceremonial. They were not mentioned by the two French Dominicans, nor by the Erfurt Minorite chronicle, which spoke of the female pope at about the same

⁸³ Cesare D'Onofrio, *La Papessa Giovanna. Roma e Papato tra storia e leggenda* (Rome 1979) 40-42, argues that the first references to Joan occurred two centuries earlier. He assumes that Marianus Scotus, Sigebert of Gembloux and Geoffrey of Viterbo knew and reported Joan's story. That it is found in certain MSS only, according to D'Onofrio, is the result of intentional deletion, when the tale is missing, rather than retrospective insertion, when it is present. To make his argument tenable, D'Onofrio ought to have indicated some early MSS that support his theory. This he fails to do. Georg Waitz and D.L.C. Bethmann, who produced the critical editions of Marianus, Sigebert and Geoffrey, knew of no old MSS referring to Joan; see MGH SS 5.551; 6.340, 470; 22.292; Döllinger, *Die Papst-Fabeln* cit. 66-68.

⁸⁴ *Chronica universalis Mettensis*, ed. Georg Waitz, MGH SS 24 (Hannover 1879) 490f., 514. For the references in Etienne de Bourbon, the Erfurt Minorite chronicle and other early sources see *ibid.* 184 and Döllinger, *Die Papst-Fabeln* cit. 9f.; D'Onofrio, *La Papessa Giovanna* cit. 42-45, Boureau, *La Papesse Jeanne* cit. 121-24.

⁸⁵ Döllinger, *Die Papst-Fabeln* cit. 21f., points out that Dominicans and Franciscans were particularly active in spreading the tale. He suggests that they may have wished to discredit the papacy during the pontificate of Boniface VIII (1294-1303), whom they opposed. While this may be a generalization, Boureau, *La Papesse Jeanne* cit. 41-43, interprets the visions of Robert of Uzès in the same sense.

time as the two French sources. Martinus Polonus, who had been a member of the papal court for many years until close to his death — or his interpolator — reported that since Joan's time the popes had always avoided a certain spot between the Colosseum and San Clemente, where her fatal accident had occurred and where she was buried. Subsequent authors set great store by such a détour allegedly made by all papal processions from St. Peter's to the Lateran. The other detail is first mentioned by the Dominican Robert of Uzès, who died in 1296 at Metz. Five years earlier he recorded at Orange some visions "about the future state of the church." One of them, whose imagery is somewhat reminiscent of Dante, Robert's contemporary,⁸⁶ concerns the vicissitudes of the See of St. Peter. In the course of relating it, Robert was reminded of "the porphyry seats in the portico of the Lateran Palace, where it is investigated, or so they say, whether the pope is male."⁸⁷ Robert may have recalled either what he had heard in the course of a visit to Rome or what he had read in the kind of simple guide book for pilgrims known as the *Mirabilia Romae*, some versions of which date from the thirteenth century. The *Mirabilia* actually confirm his story.⁸⁸ The twin porphyry seats were a relic of imperial Rome (and really made of red marble). They still exist; one is now in the Vatican Museum, the other in the Louvre. Their peculiarity is that the central portion of the seat panel is cut away.⁸⁹ In their earlier location at the Lateran they were used from 1099, or earlier, until the sixteenth century in the course of the ceremonies accompanying the enthronement of new popes.

Despite some isolated spurts of sceptical reasoning,⁹⁰ Joan's story

⁸⁶ Dante, *Divina Commedia*, Purgatorio 29-33.

⁸⁷ "Les Visions de Robert d'Uzès O.P.," ed. J. Bignami-Odier, *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 25 (1955) 258-320, esp. 274; cf. D'Onofrio, *La papessa Giovanna* cit. 54. Boureau, *La Papesse Jeanne* cit. 16f. Boureau found that the verification of male sex was also mentioned in the chronicle of Geoffroy de Courlon, who was Robert's contemporary.

⁸⁸ *Mirabilia Romae e codicibus Vaticanis emendata*, ed. Gustav Parthey (Berlin 1869) 51f., 56; cf. D'Onofrio, *La papessa Giovanna* cit. 68f.

⁸⁹ D'Onofrio (*La papessa Giovanna* cit. 140-84) believes that they are gynaecological chairs. They certainly show great resemblance to some chairs used in the Middle Ages by women who were giving birth. Boureau, *La Papesse Jeanne* cit. 56-82, believes that, despite the difference in shape, they were meant to be *sellae curules*, reserved in Rome for consuls and pretors and symbols of their authority.

⁹⁰ The contemporary biographer of Urban V (1362-70) points out that on 1 March 1368 the pope, returning from the Lateran, took the direct route and did not avoid the spot where Joan allegedly had given birth *quemadmodum alias nonnulli ex suis predecessores fecisse leguntur*. "In 1406 a careful description of the enthronement ceremonies of Gregory XII treats the sex inspection as a ridiculous folk tale: *"insanam loquitur vulgus fabulam ..."* See Döllinger, *Die*

continued to be spun out in lavish detail. Especially the tale about the verification of the sex of future popes was evidently believed or, as in Rabelais' case, at least enjoyed.⁹¹ For a long time no one, not even the clergy, seems to have been embarrassed by this outrage to papal decorum. At the turn to the sixteenth century, Joan was given her due place between Leo IV and Benedict III, when the central nave of the cathedral of Siena was lined with a series of 171 terracotta busts of popes, beginning with St Peter and ending with Lucius III (1181-85).⁹² Nevertheless, it was again in the Renaissance that *fabula*, in this case personified by the legendary popess, began to spell trouble and cause scruples. A 'hot' allegory may have helped Joan's popularity to soar to new heights. In Dante's *Comedy* the Great Whore of Babylon makes an unforgettable appearance. Seated on a processional chariot representing the church, she flirts with a giant standing beside her. Dante's whore is Pope Clement V, seen here in collusion with Philip IV of France, but she is also the papacy collectively who, oblivious of her sacred office, prostitutes herself with wordly power.⁹³ Soon this image was everywhere. In 1411 a procession not unlike that imagined by Dante wound through the streets of Prague. It featured a young man dressed up as a harlot and adorned with the papal insignia. In 1540 the woodcut of a German pamphlet depicted her, riding the seven-headed monster of the

Papst-Fabeln cit. 38; D'Onofrio, *La papessa Giovanna* cit. 59-66, 86-88; Boureau, *La Papesse Jeanne* cit. 20-26.

⁹¹ François Rabelais, *Le Quart Livre* ch. 48. In 1484 an eye-witness of the ceremonies following the election of Innocent VIII firmly stated that the embarrassing sex inspection was duly performed. There is, however, convincing evidence that he had seen something that did not happen. Much the same occurred as late as 1644 during the enthronement of Innocent X; see Döllinger, *Die Papst-Fabeln* cit. 39f.; D'Onofrio, *La papessa Giovanna* cit. 107f.; Boureau, *La Papesse Jeanne* cit. 30-35. In the 1490s Jacopo Filippo Foresti of Bergamo claimed that both the deviation and the sex inspection were still being performed at that time ("*in hodiernum*"); see J.F. Foresti, *De plurimis claris selectisque mulieribus* (Ferrara 1497) ch. 143. For Foresti see below p. 161. In 1531 Giampietro Valeriani Bolzanio produced a humorous argument in support of bearded clerics. It was addressed to Cardinal Ippolito de' Medici and printed in Rome with a papal printer's privilege. To show the disadvantages of clean-shaving, Valeriani mentioned at some length the incident of the female pope. Merely hedging himself with a "*si vera est quae per omnium ora fabula circumfertur*," he claimed that the sex inspection, resulting from that accident, was universally accepted as a fact and that the Romans still continued to point their fingers to the spot where the popess had given birth. I consulted Joannes Pierius Valerianus Bellunensis, *Pro sacerdotium barbis ... declamatio* 9, published as an appendix to his *Hieroglyphica* (Lyon 1602).

⁹² Gerhart B. Ladner, *Die Papstbildnisse des Altertums und des Mittelalters* (Rome 1941-84) III 176-79.

⁹³ Dante, *Purgatorio* 32.148-60.

Apocalypse, with the emperor and a train of princes kneeling at her feet. A rhyme identifies her as Agnes, alias Joan: "Agnes ain Weib aus Engelant / Iohannes der Sibent genant / Anno 851."⁹⁴ No wonder that, according to Luther's *Table Talk*, the reformer claimed that he had seen her funeral monument in Rome with his own eyes.⁹⁵

In 1415 Jan Hus was condemned as a heretic by the Council of Constance and burned on the spot. In his trial he had maintained that popes were not indispensable. Perhaps he recalled a similar point made by John Wyclif (d. 1384), when he argued that, after all, the church had survived a prolonged interruption in the chain of legitimate papal government at the time of Joan. The argument caused vexation among the judges and assessors, who could not think of a valid rebuttal.⁹⁶ Even Bartolomeo Platina (1421-81), official historian of the papacy, found himself in much the same position and decided to repeat the legend. Its sources, he said, were untrustworthy, but it was so generally known that he would be open to blame if he were to ignore it. Using Quintilian's criteria, he was not prepared to write the story off as a *fabula*, nor to accept it as *historia*; instead he characterized it diplomatically as a neutral *argumentum*.⁹⁷ Either he did not know how to refute it, or he saw no need to do so. The tide turned in the sixteenth century. Scholars, at least, began to condemn the tale outright. Johannes Aventinus (d. 1534) explained in an ingenious aside that the story was a satire on Pope John X (914-28), lover and tool of the powerful 'Senatrix' Theodora.⁹⁸ Onofrio

⁹⁴ The woodcut shows great similarity with one of Lucas Cranach's (or his helpers') illustrations for the Book of Revelation in Luther's German New Testament of 1522, but in this latter no identification with Joan is spelled out or intended. See Boureau, *La Papesse Jeanne* cit. 240f., 250-52; André Chastel, *The Sack of Rome, 1527*, transl. B. Archer (Princeton, N.J. 1983) 72-75.

⁹⁵ See below n. 119.

⁹⁶ Boureau, *La Papesse Jeanne* cit. 172-74, 241-43. Melchior Vischer, *Jan Hus* (Frankfurt a.M. 1940) II 148f., 326f. Thirty-six years later, when the argument was repeated by one of Hus' followers, the future Pope Pius II could only reply that neither Catholic doctrine nor the Canon Law was to blame for what had happened; also that the story was not certain. See *Der Briefwechsel des Eneas Silvius Piccolomini*, ed R. Wolkan (Vienna 1909-18) III-1 40 (letter to Juan Carvajal, 21 August 1451); cf. D'Onofrio, *La papessa Giovanna* 112f.

⁹⁷ Platina, *Liber de vita Cristi* cit., 151f.: "*Haec, quae dixi, vulgo feruntur, incertis tamen et obscuris auctoribus: quae ideo ponere breviter et nude institui, ne obstinate nimium et pertinaciter omisisse videar, quod omnes affirmant: erremus etiam nos hac in re cum vulgo, quamquam appareat, ea quae dixi, ex his esse, quae fieri posse creduntur,*" cf. D'Onofrio, *La papessa Giovanna* 30-33.

⁹⁸ Johannes Aventinus, *Annales Boiorum* (Ingolstadt 1554) book IV, p. 474. Boureau, *La Papesse Jeanne* cit. 28-30, 266-69, also for what follows here.

Panvinio, after thorough researches in the Vatican Library, suggested that the satirized pope was John XII.⁹⁹ Both thus pointed the way towards a zone of hypothesis that still attracts a good deal of attention. The daughter of Theodora and Theophylact, the 'Senatrix' Marozia, was the mother of Pope John XI (931-35). She was the central figure of that local family of uncertain origin that was for a while firmly in control of Rome. Their rule — it has been dubbed pornocracy — was marked by an incredible lack of public and private decency. The papal office was treated like any other public position within the family's gift. It is true that some periods of reprieve were afforded by another son of Marozia (and half-brother of John XI), 'Princeps' Alberic II, and by the interventions of the German emperor, Otto I. But papal misrule and misconduct returned with Alberic's son, John XII (955-63), and Marozia's nephew, John XIII (965-72). Predictably, John XI, John XII, remembered for incest and whoredom, and John XIII were all found to be suitable candidates for satirization in the guise of the woman pope Joan.

Panvinio's arguments were taken up by Caesar Baronius and others; scholarly historiography of the papal church no longer hesitated to treat the story of Joan as a mischievous satire that was subsequently exploited by protestant polemicists, such as Pier Paolo Vergerio the Younger.¹⁰⁰ Pope Sixtus V (1585-90), the great demolisher of medieval Rome, was credited with the removal of an ominous statue of Joan allegedly placed on the spot where she had given birth.¹⁰¹ Baronius and his papal master, Clement VIII (1592-1605), caused the refashioning of Joan's bust in the cathedral of Siena. On 9 October 1600 she became Pope Zachary (741-52).¹⁰² Waldensians, it was argued, or even Greek opponents of the papacy had invented Joan to discredit the Holy See. On the other hand,

⁹⁹ *Historia B. Platinae de vitis Pontificum*, ed. O. Panvinio cit. (Cologne 1568) 134-37.

¹⁰⁰ Pier Paolo Vergerio published anonymously a tract about Joan, which had great success and, between 1556 and 1584, appeared in Latin, Italian, German, French and English versions; see D'Onofrio, *La papessa Giovanna* cit. 114-20 and passim, also for what follows; Boureau, *La Papesse Jeanne* cit. 261-64.

¹⁰¹ See below p. 107.

¹⁰² The change could be effected by a mere relabelling since no more than ten types were used repeatedly for the busts of all the 170 successors to St. Peter. See A. Pagi's additions to Baronius' *Annales* cit. ad annum 855; Vittorio Lusini, *Il duomo di Siena* (Siena 1911-39) II 148f. See also Döllinger, *Die Papst-Fabeln* cit. 1-5, 22. The Catholic controversialist Florimond de Raemon (1540-1601) seems to have claimed credit for the elimination of Joan's name among the busts in Siena. Boureau, *La Papesse Jeanne* cit. 272, refers to the last editions of Raemon's *Erreur populaire de la papesse Jeanne*. I failed to find such a statement in the edition, s.l. 1588.

protestant authors were considerably more reluctant than their Catholic counterparts to deny Joan's historicity without vacillation, even though the Calvinist David Blondel had done just this in his *Familier esclaircissement* (Amsterdam 1647).¹⁰³ In the 1840s the Dutch professors Nicolaas Christiaan Kist and Justus Henricus Wensing did battle over Joan's existence, the former asserting and the latter denying it. A little earlier Heinrich Luden had done his best to sustain the probability, at least, of Joan's existence, and by the end of the nineteenth century Karl August von Hase wrote ambiguously about a "forgery" that had never been proven to be one.¹⁰⁴

Was Joan invented by a satirist? Most satirical writings are contemporary to the events described in them. If Joan's story was invented in the tenth century, it is next to impossible that for another three hundred years it would never once have surfaced. Should one therefore assume that the satirist belonged to a later age, presumably the thirteenth century, when the tale made its highly successful *début*? Historical satires do exist; only one would think that after such a lapse of time any events that could mobilize satirists would have to be widely known and deemed significant. And there is no evidence of a widespread and absorbing interest in the thirteenth century for the convoluted intrigues of Marozia and her papal kinsmen. If, however, they were remembered anywhere at that time, one is tempted to hypothesize, it probably was in Rome amid clerical circles. We have seen that even in the earliest stages in the development of Joan's legend first-hand knowledge of Roman topography and papal ceremonial are plainly evident. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, it thus seems reasonable to assume that the tale was first told by the middle of the thirteenth century among friars who appreciated a good laugh, and why not at the expense of the papacy.

We would appear to be on safer ground, however, when we point out that Joan's story contains several elements of migratory myth. Whoever invented the popess was able to draw on the rich store of common experience enshrined in myths, which refuse to be tied to specific locations and points in time. One such instance concerns women disguising themselves as men in order to break through the

¹⁰³ Boureau, *La Papesse Jeanne* cit. 274-76 and *passim* for subsequent debates.

¹⁰⁴ Heinrich Luden, *Geschichte des Deutschen Volkes* (Gotha/Erfurt 1825-37) VI 512-17; Karl August von Hase, *Kirchengeschichte auf der Grundlage akademischer Vorlesungen* (Leipzig 1885-93) II 69, 77-82.

barriers of exclusively male preserves, in this case higher learning and the holy orders of the church. That this was bound to happen from time to time is highly plausible; but this is not the issue that needs to be investigated at this point.¹⁰⁵ What matters here is the potential for myth inherent in this situation. Among Byzantine hagiographers the tales of saintly women disguised as monks were commonplace.¹⁰⁶ The *Legenda aurea* records no less than four women living incognito as male monks and earning sainthood, all four of them in much the same fashion.¹⁰⁷ A less respectable but equally popular variety of tales concerned women disguised as young clerics ostensibly appointed to the personal service of their clerical lovers. Such stories were often told of prelates and even popes. When Cardinal Pietro Pierleoni (later Anacletus II as anti-pope; d. 1138) travelled to England as a papal legate, he allegedly concealed the presence of his mistress in this fashion.¹⁰⁸ The special opprobrium attached to a woman in men's clothes was recognized by the Canon Law, which treated the practice as an offence.¹⁰⁹ It is perhaps best known from the trial of Joan of Arc.

Another element of myth in the tale of Popess Joan concerns the verification of male sex as part of an enthronement ritual. In the Middle Ages proof of virility was surpassed in importance perhaps only by proof of virginity. Physical examinations to ascertain whether or not a woman was a virgin were common in many societies both inside and outside Europe.¹¹⁰ Joan of Arc underwent this procedure

¹⁰⁵ A good example is a letter of 1053/4, addressed to the Patriarch of Constantinople, Michael Caerularius, by Leo IX. The pope said he had heard, but could not believe, that in Constantinople eunuchs and even a woman had occupied the episcopal see at one time or another. See PL 143.744-69, esp. 760.

¹⁰⁶ Evelyne Patlagean, "L'Histoire de la femme déguisée en moine et l'évolution de la sainteté féminine à Byzance" *Studi medievali* 3rd series 17 (1976) 597-623.

¹⁰⁷ Jacobus a Voragine, *Legenda aurea* cit., St. Marina (ch. 84, 18 June), St. Theodora (ch. 92, 11 September), St. Margaret (ch. 151, 8 October) and St. Eugenia (ch. 136, 11 September, on Sts. Protus and Hyacinthus). While living as monks, the first three women are falsely accused of having fathered a child. Rather than protesting their innocence, they suffer the punishment imposed on them. Not until after death are their true sex and saintly conduct recognized. St. Eugenia also lives as a monk. When being accused of having seduced a woman, she bares herself to prove her innocence.

¹⁰⁸ Joachim Prinz, *Popes from the Ghetto* (New York 1966) 199.

¹⁰⁹ Boureau, *La Papesse Jeanne* cit. 50f., quotes the *Margarita Decreti* by Martinus Polonus, who mentions the practice in his short survey of decrees concerning women. For his role in spreading the tale of Joan see above p. 97f.

¹¹⁰ Ashley Montagu, *Sex, Man and Society* (New York 1969) 104f.

on at least two occasions and was always found to be intact.¹¹¹ The Canon Law recognized evidence of both female virginity and male impotence gathered by way of physical examination. During many weddings stained sheets were inspected and even displayed as visible proof of the consummation of the marriage.¹¹² Modern science has taught that the conclusions drawn from such procedures were bound to be wrong at times and based on myth rather than medical experience. It is, however, not this medical myth that concerns us here, but simply the fact that verification of sex was a fairly common procedure. Once the popess had been invented, it would offer a popular explanation for the mysterious design of the twin seats at the Lateran.

A third element of myth in at least one version of Joan's story is public exposure as a means of salvation. According to one version of Martinus Polonus' chronicle, Joan survived the ordeal of childbirth on a public street and afterwards lived for many years a life of penance.¹¹³ The suggestion, obviously, is that in the end she was saved. The *Mirabilia Romae* even offer clear evidence of her salvation. During her life of sin Joan has a vision, in which she must choose between either public exposure and disgrace or eternal damnation. Wisely she opts for ignominy and death, and saves her soul.¹¹⁴ An identical choice is provided, as we shall soon discover, in the legend of Pope Sylvester II. Again we are here confronted with a tradition which is grounded in common experience. The sacrament of penance provided every individual with multiple opportunities to choose between exposure or sinful silence that might lead to damnation. Moreover, while confession usually took place in private before a priest beholden to confidentiality, the works of penance that the priest imposed upon the contrite sinner, though they might well conceal the nature of the sin, still tended to involve a public exposure of the fact that sins had been committed.

Another curious parallel would seem to confirm that Joan's public exposure should be assigned to the sphere of migratory myth. In this case too one notes that early versions lack as yet any indication of the

¹¹¹ Marina Warner, *Joan of Arc. The Image of Female Heroism* (London 1981) 16 and passim.

¹¹² Vern L. Bullough and James Brundage, *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church* (Buffalo, N.Y. 1982) 136 and passim.

¹¹³ See above n. 82.

¹¹⁴ See above n. 88. Döllinger, *Die Papst-Fabeln* cit. 31.

pope's name or the time of his pontificate, so that specific circumstances could be added later on in a variety of ways. The legend in question is that of a Jewish pope, known in Hebrew, Spanish, Arabic and Yiddish versions. In one, already elaborate, tradition the Jewish pope hails from Mainz, like the female one. He is Elhanan, abducted son of Rabbi Simeon ben Isaac ('the Great', born c. 950). After a confrontation with his father, the nameless pope acts to save his soul from damnation. He publicly denies that Christ was the Messiah and then leaps to his death. In another version he returns to his native city and the faith of his elders, leaving behind in the papal chamber, for his successors to read, a book about the erroneous presumptions of the Christian faith.¹¹⁵ Much later only the Jewish pope is named Andreas. Finally, scholarly reflection has associated the tale with the above-mentioned anti-pope Anacletus II, who was of Jewish origin, or with Pope Alexander III (1159-81), who was well disposed towards the Jews. Unlike Joan, the Jew is viewed with sympathy and approval, but both are representatives of an underprivileged social group who have reached the pinnacle of dignity and power normally reserved for members of the élites. In view of their despised status, their success is preposterous — only public exposure can redeem them.

This is the place to mention two more details found already in the earliest versions of Joan's tale; it is tempting to assign both to the same sphere of migratory story-telling. According to Jean de Mailly an inscription carved in stone was placed at the spot where Joan had given birth and died. Jean gives the text in the form of a Latin hexameter consisting of six words, each beginning with the letter P.¹¹⁶ In Silvester II we shall soon encounter another pope shrouded in legendary mist, who had his career similarly epitomized in an

¹¹⁵ *Mimekor Yisrael. Classical Jewish Folktales*, collected by Micha Joseph bin Gorion (Berdyczewski), tr. I.M. Lask (Bloomington 1976) I 408-16. *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. Isidore Singer et al. (New York n.d.) I 578-80.

¹¹⁶ "*Petre, pater patrum, papisse prodito partum.*" The verse is also given, with slight variations, by Etienne de Bourbon and the Erfurt Minorite chronicle; cf above {p. 2, n.3. Starting with Döllinger (*Die Papst-Fabeln* cit. 33-35), it has often been suggested that such a stone slab may actually have existed and that its — probably mutilated — inscription was misinterpreted to fit Joan's tale. In particular, the phrase "*pater patrum*," which recurs in each of the three early versions, was associated with the ancient cult of Mithras. The phrase, however, may be remembered rather than deciphered on an old monument. From the seventh century "*pater patrum*" was often used in reference to the pope: see *Glossarium mediae et infimae Latinitatis*, begun by Charles Dufresne, sieur Du Cange, new ed. (Nior-London 1884-87) VI 210.

alliterating hexameter — a style that was popular both in classical Antiquity and the Middle Ages.¹¹⁷ In Joan's case the commemorative inscription prepares the way for the invention of a funeral monument marking the spot of her disgrace and death. Döllinger found the first mention of such a slab in the verses of Jacob van Maerlant (died c. 1299), one of the earliest poets in the Netherlands tongue. According to the previously mentioned version of the *Mirabilia Romae*, it depicted the popess and her baby son.¹¹⁸ It can be expected that such a monument was pointed out for a while to local folk as well as visitors who showed an interest in the popess. According to his *Table Talk* Martin Luther claimed to have seen it with his own eyes when he visited Rome.¹¹⁹ Throughout the Middle Ages countless visible records were discovered that appeared to match familiar tales. In particular Rome and Jerusalem, great centres of pilgrimage, were replete with such objects, many of them relics piously identified in pursuit of a holy cause. If Joan was not exactly holy, she was certainly deserving of popular attention.

¹¹⁷ For Silvester II see below n. 141. Readers whose schooling has included a Greek primer will likely remember the ancient jingle "*Kappadokes, Kares, Kilikes: tria kappa kakista.*" For medieval examples see *Gesta Romanorum*, ed. Hermann Oesterley (Berlin 1872) 292, 341 (chs. 13, 42).

¹¹⁸ Döllinger, *Die Papst-Fabeln* cit. 32f., 42-45; for the *Mirabilia Romae* see above n. 88. Boureau, *La Papesse Jeanne* cit. 55, 370, found the monument mentioned in Jacobus a Voragine's *Chronica Januensis*, c. 1297. Again it was Döllinger who offered a speculation that proved highly successful with subsequent authors. He suggested that an ancient Roman funeral slab, perchance in a poor state of preservation, might have been found near San Clemente and that it might have been instrumental in creating Joan's tale. Döllinger quotes some interesting cases where the fanciful interpretation of a mysterious monument gave rise to a fine story. In Joan's case the question is what came first, the story or the stone. All we can say is that in a large majority of similar cases the story led to the presumed visible record, and not vice-versa.

¹¹⁹ Luther, *Werke* (Weimar 1883 —) *Tischreden* 5 nos. 6447, 6452, cf. 3 no. 3607. Boureau, *La Papesse Jeanne* cit. 256.

V

Pope Silvester II

We shall conclude this survey of some papal legends with another pontiff seduced by the devil, Silvester II (999-1003). He warrants discussion at this point, not so much because of his considerable claims to historical greatness, but because his legend has fed at one time or another on all three fountain-heads of *fabula*. Uninhibited fantasy and a liberal dose of political spite converge with a naive desire to unravel the mysteries of history. Gerbert of Aurillac, in the Auvergne, eventually became the first Frenchman to ascend the papal throne. What sets him apart from all other popes of the High Middle Ages is his intellectual calibre. The young monk had studied in Catalonia; the legend that he had gone farther south, to al-Andalus, and sat at the feet of Moorish magi is alive even today. This legend was due no doubt to the fact that mathematics, especially algebra, was the field, in which he made the greatest contribution to the progress of learning. A contemporary chronicler marvelled at the “*orologium*” he constructed in Magdeburg, adjusting it with the help of a looking tube trained on the polar star.¹²⁰ He was also an innovative and successful teacher. In the cathedral school of Reims he gave mathematics a status equal to that traditionally enjoyed by dialectic and grammar. Among his students were both the future King Robert II of France and the young Emperor Otto III. For Otto’s benefit he collected classical literature — manuscripts that came to form the nucleus of the episcopal library of Bamberg. In an age when few men read Cicero, Gerbert turned for comfort to his moral precepts. Both Hugh Capet and Otto III availed themselves of Gerbert’s accomplished Latinity and political wisdom. The former nominated him to the archbishopric of Reims, the latter to that of Ravenna and eventually placed him in the see of Rome.

What truly amazed Gerbert’s contemporaries was his incomprehensible knowledge of the universe.¹²¹ The writings of his

¹²⁰ Thietmar of Merseburg, *Chronicon* 6.100 (61).

¹²¹ Richer, a monk of Saint-Rémy (940/50 — after 998), undertook at Gerbert’s behest to write a French history. His careful account (3.43-65) is, apart from Gerbert’s own letters, a principal source of biographical information, especially for Gerbert’s educational reforms at Reims, which included the use of mechanical spheres for the teaching of astronomy. See Richer,

contemporaries Abbo of Fleury and Adalbero of Laon offer clear evidence that already in his lifetime Gerbert was accused in France of practising evil magic.¹²² The principal fabricator of his legend, however, was Benno of Osnabrück (d. 1088). Benno was involved in the great conflict between Emperor Henry IV and Pope Gregory VII. Created a cardinal by anti-pope Clement III, who was a partisan of Henry, Benno was for some time bitterly opposed Pope Gregory, whose real name was Hildebrand. Around 1080 Benno composed a tract, in which he denounced Gerbert as the master of those who, in turn, taught the evil arts to Hildebrand. As Benno has it, Gerbert is driven by demons to whom he owes his dazzling ascent from lowly beginnings as well as his well-deserved undoing. They assure Gerbert, who is now Pope Sylvester II, that he will not die before he has celebrated mass in Jerusalem. Too late Sylvester realizes that the prophecy relates to the Roman church of Santa Croce di Gerusalemme rather than the holy city in the Orient. Thus divine retribution finally catches up with him while he is saying mass in Santa Croce at a day when popes are by custom obliged to do so. Then and there Sylvester is “overcome by a pitiful and disgusting death. In his pangs of agony he implores [his attendants] to cut off his hands and his tongue, with which he had sacrificed to the demons and thus dishonoured God.”¹²³

Histoire de France, ed. and transl. Robert Latouche (Paris 1930-37) II 53ff. and passim. Hermann of Reichenau (d. 1054) noted in his *Chronicon* Gerbert's “secular devotion to mundane learning,” which aroused the curiosity of Otto III (“*seculari litteraturae nimium deditus et ob hoc curioso imperatori admodum amatus*”): *Chronicon*, year 1000, in *Quellen des 9. und 11. Jahrhunderts zur Geschichte der Hamburgischen Kirche und des Reiches*, ed. Werner Trillmich and Rudolf Buchner (Darmstadt 1961) 654. See Döllinger, *Die Papst-Fabeln* cit. 184-88 and Graf, *Miti, leggende e superstizioni* cit. II 3-75. Pierre Riché, *Gerbert d'Aurillac. Le pape de l'an mil* (Paris 1987) 79ff. and passim. François Picavet, *Gerbert, un pape philosophe, d'après l'histoire et d'après la légende* (Paris 1897) 197ff. Percy Ernst Schramm, *Kaiser, Rom und Renovatio* second ed. (Darmstadt 1957) 96-100 and passim. Fedor Schneider, *Rom und der Romgedanke im Mittelalter* second ed. (Darmstadt 1959) 157f. and passim.

¹²² Massimo Oldoni, “Gerberto e la sua storia” *Studi medievali*, 3rd series 18 (1977) ii 629-704, 21 (1980) 493-622, 24 (1983) 167-245, esp. 18.ii.681-88.

¹²³ Benno of Osnabrück et al., *Gesta Romanae ecclesiae contra Hildebrandum*, MGH *Libelli de Lite* II (Hannover 1892) 376f.

The legend took root without delay.¹²⁴ A full and singularly influential version of Gerbert's tale is due to William of Malmesbury (d. 1141), a devoted collector of fables, who reported the major episodes in loving detail.¹²⁵ Yet even William felt a need to justify the extravagance of his story. He did so by saying that he was merely reporting what was anyhow the talk of the town. He has the French monk Gerbert fleeing to Spain by night, driven either by boredom or thirst for fame. Gerbert is the first to learn the use of the *abacus* from the Saracens. With its help he develops arithmetical rules that, says William, still are very hard to understand, even for specialists. Gerbert masters all the lawful sciences without exploiting his talents to the full, so he is turning to astrology, divination and black magic. He lives with a Muslim scholar, who imparts his knowledge liberally, except for the contents of one jealously guarded book. Gerbert seduces the man's daughter, who helps him to steal the precious book from under her father's pillow. With the Saracen in hot pursuit, Gerbert hides under a wooden bridge, suspending himself in such a manner as to touch neither earth nor water. Finally he is carried to safety across the sea by the devil, with whom he has made a pact to last in perpetuity.

At this point William of Malmesbury again turned defensive. He admitted that allegations of contact with demons were often concocted by simple folk who envied the scholars their fame. In Gerbert's case, however, William argued, the allegation was supported by a shameful death and the latter was confirmed in a list of popes that William had among his papers. According to an oral account that had been given to William in his youth by a monk from Aquitaine, this is how Gerbert died. At an astrologically propitious moment he casts a bronze statue, whose head can reveal the future by answering questions with either yes or no. It says yes to the question whether Gerbert will become pope, and no to the further query whether he will die before saying mass in Jerusalem. Gerbert comes to grief by misinterpreting the second answer. As in the case of Popess Joan, however, his

¹²⁴ Not deterred by Richer's praise of Silvester, Hugo, abbot of Flavigny, attributed Gerbert's elevation to the archbishoprics of Reims and Ravenna to deceitful tricks (*praestigia*); see his *Chronicon* (until 1102), ed. W. Wattenbach, MGH SS VIII (Hannover 1868) 367. The *Chronicon S. Andreae Castri Camaracesii*, 1001-33, has Silvester end his life with the composition of a hexameter: "*Nil abacus mathesisque tibi, Gerberte, iuvabunt;*" ed. L.C. Bethmann, MGH SS VII (Hannover 1866) 527.

¹²⁵ William of Malmesbury, *De gestis regum Anglorum libri quinque. Historiae novellae libri tres*, ed. William Stubbs (London 1887-89) I 193-203.

undoing opens the way to salvation and the devil loses his prey. As William points out, popes used to sing mass in the Roman church of Santa Croce di Gerusalemme on three consecutive Sundays. As he is preparing to do so, Pope Sylvester is struck with sudden sickness. He realizes his mistake, calls his cardinals together and confesses his crimes. By now at the threshold of death, he orders that his body is to be dismembered and his limbs cast away. "Let him make use of them," he exclaims, "who formerly requested their homage (*hominium*), for my soul never consented to that sacrilegious oath."

A number of chroniclers, such as the widely read Vincent of Beauvais and Martinus Polonus, were eager to repeat every detail of William's story and the gist of it was incorporated even in the *Liber pontificalis*.¹²⁶ There was room, however, for other gems of fancy to be added. The earliest known version of a *Descriptio Lateranensis ecclesiae*, dating from the twelfth century, possibly even from its beginning, appears to be our first source for a curious epilogue to Sylvester's pitiful demise. It relates that his tomb in the Lateran basilica mysteriously sweats drops of water.¹²⁷ Soon this portent and an accompanying rattling of Sylvester's bones were taken to be sure signs of the imminent death of the ruling pope or another luminary of the curia. The apex of fictional embellishment is reached with another English writer, Walter Map (c.1140 — c.1209), whose account must be characterized as a historical novel rather than legendary history. Amorous romance had already infiltrated the account of William of Malmesbury, whose enrichments of the legend included the bewitched daughter of the Moorish magus. It was Map, however, who got romance to rule supreme. The daughter of the provost of Reims makes her appearance, an irresistible beauty of haughty character. She rejects Gerbert's advances, and the poor monk goes literally mad with love. But then he meets in the forest near Reims at the hour of noon (*hora meridiana*) a young lady endowed with supernatural powers, who is appropriately named Meridiana. Although she describes herself as God's creature, she is in fact a demon. Together with her maidenhood she offers Gerbert unlimited wealth and, on account of the latter, a revengeful triumph over the prudish daughter of the provost. Meridiana follows him to Rome and, logically, is made to deliver the

¹²⁶ *Liber Pontificalis*, ed. Duchesne cit. II 263f. (the version dates from the fifteenth century).

¹²⁷ *Codice topografico della città di Roma*, ed. R. Valentini and G. Zucchetti (Rome 1940-53) III 319-73, esp. 348.

traditional Jerusalem oracle. While she is looking forward to claim her prey once and for all, Silvester repents and performs an unsparing public confession before the assembled cardinals and all the people. Afterwards he spends the remainder of his life doing penance, and dies properly shriven, having ruled the church with a firm hand.¹²⁸

Renaissance authors reacted to Gerbert's tale in keeping with their general views on church and society. As early as 1413/14 Dietrich von Nieheim expressed high regard for Silvester II and attributed the allegations against him to the venom shown to scholars by the people of Rome.¹²⁹ Platina stuck to the policy he had adopted in the case of Popess Joan. He repeated the entire legend as he had found it in Martinus Polonus, merely protecting himself with a prudent "*ut aiunt*" in his opening statement that Silvester had gained the papacy by black magic ("*malis artibus*"). Whether his tomb in fact sweated and his bones rattled would have to be decided by those concerned, i.e. the popes.¹³⁰ By contrast, Onofrio Panvinio came to Silvester's rescue with the same diligence as he had shown in his discussion of Joan. In his notes on Platina's narrative he expressed his dismay at the negligence and gullibility of previous historians and referred to early sources that did not show any traces of the legend. He hoped to settle the matter once and for all by printing Silvester's funeral inscription in the Lateran basilica, by means of which Pope Sergius IV (1009-12) had exonerated his predecessor.¹³¹

Panvinio was an unrelenting critic of the ultra-Lutheran Magdeburg centuriators. He may or may not have anticipated their double-handed attack upon Silvester in the tenth *Centuria* of their great ecclesiastical history, whose publication narrowly predated that of Panvinio's last revision of Platina. The Magdeburgers first used fine historical

¹²⁸ Walter Map, *De nugis curialium* ed. M.R. James (Oxford 1914) 176-83. Map credits Silvester's public confession with an enduring impact on papal ceremonial. As consecration and communion follow his confession in Santa Croce, Silvester continues to face his audience, and from that day onwards popes have always been face to face with the congregation while receiving communion, when many other prelates remain behind the altar while mass is celebrated: "*Statuit etiam ut deinceps contra clerum et populum in facie omnium fieret consecratio. Unde multi altari celebrant interposito, dominus autem papa percipit facie ad faciem omnium sedens.*"

¹²⁹ Dietrich von Nieheim, *Cronica* in MHG *Staatsschriften des späteren Mittelalters* V-2, ed. K. Colberg and J. Leuschner (Stuttgart 1980) 143-292, esp. 241f.

¹³⁰ Platina, *Liber de vita Christi* cit. 177.

¹³¹ *Historia B. Platinae* cit. (Cologne 1568) 160f. Panvinio's preface is dated from Rome, Kalends of November 1567. However, in his *Epitome pontificum Romanorum* (Venice 1557) 53, Panvinio too had repeated the traditional legend.

scholarship to wound Silvester's reputation and then administered the *coup the grace* by repeating the old fables. They were the first to publish the Acts of the Council of Saint-Basle at Reims, 991 — Acts that attempted to justify Gerbert's controversial and legally dubious appointment to the see of Reims; Acts, moreover, that were edited by none other than Gerbert himself. In a subsequent section, however, the Magdeburgers threw historical scholarship to the winds and happily repeated the entire tale of magic and satanic commerce right down to the rattling bones in the pope's tomb.¹³²

Subsequent Catholic historians found themselves in a difficult position. Since Gerbert's election to the see of Reims had been opposed by Pope John XV (985-96), they had to deny its legitimacy and to attack Gerbert's edition of the synodal acts. But at the same time they had to defend the validity of his tenure of the Holy See so as not to jeopardize the sanctity of the continuous apostolic succession. Baronius accomplished this task in a forthright fashion. He described Gerbert as an astute manipulator and a creature of Otto III. The latter had helped him to the throne of St. Peter, of which he was entirely unworthy. "So much can be maintained quite firmly: nobody ever was elevated to the see of St. Peter, who has slighted that very see as much as Gerbert had in his writings." It was the unseemliness of his election that gave rise to the false rumour that it had been achieved by dint of magic incantations, Baronius suggested. Since in that ignorant century mathematics was equated with magic, Benno, and those who followed him, described Gerbert as an accomplished magician.¹³³ After Baronius, the good work of Catholic rehabilitation was continued by the Polish Dominican Abraham Bzovius in his long-winded biography of Silvester II. He succeeded in blending out all the shortcomings that Baronius had felt obliged to attribute to Gerbert.¹³⁴ In 1648 Silvester's tomb in San Giovanni di Laterano was opened and his remains were found to be intact and odoriferous, exuding saintliness.¹³⁵ *Fabula* never dies. If, on the one hand,

¹³² *Decima centuria ecclesiasticae historiae* (Basel, September 1567) 457-520, 547-48. For the Acts of the Saint-Basle Council see MGH SS III 658-86.

¹³³ Cesare Baronio, *Annales ecclesiastici* cit. X (Rome 1602) 926-36, esp. 926-27; cf. also XI (Rome 1605) 1-16.

¹³⁴ Abraham Bzovius (Bzowski), *Silvester II Caesius Aquitanus Pontifex Maximus* (Rome 1629). I was using a reprint appended to Bzovius' *Annalium ... continuatio. Tomus XX* (Cologne 1641) 563-97. According to Bzovius, Silvester was descended from the Caesii family of ancient Rome. Cf. also Joseph-Marie Suarès, *Vindiciae Silvestri II Pontificis Maximi* (Lyon 1658).

¹³⁵ Oldoni, "Gerberto ..." cit. *Studi medievali* 3rd series 18 (1977) ii 665-66.

Bzovius achieved a perfect hagiographic retouch, the magician's tale, on the other hand, was too good to let go. In 1833 Jules Michelet, the greatest French historian of his day, presented the first French pope as a subtle politician and indeed an "*homme diabolique*," the prototype of Doctor Faust.¹³⁶ Even in recent years parascholarly writers have perpetuated the myth of the great magician and the legends of the shepherd boy gazing at the stars through a tube, the student at Cordova and the Roman statue pointing the way to a treasure cave.¹³⁷

All major springs of medieval fabulizing have fed the legend of Silvester II. Political and, subsequently, confessional bias accompanied his progress through historiography from Benno of Osnabrück to the Magdeburg centuriators and the Catholic apologists of the seventeenth century. Several of these biased appraisals also exhibit the tendency to retouch Gerbert's portrait, which was already present when contemporary folk logic equated his rare mathematical skills with diabolical magic brought back from the land of the infidels. Gerbert needed to be presented as an exemplar either of papal worthiness or of fraudulent magic; the latter approach, as we have seen, can still be found in recent publications. Above all Gerbert's legend is rich in mythical elements and apt to provide some fascinating, albeit sketchy, insights into the migration of myth. Gerbert has been warned that Jerusalem was the place where he was to die. For all his shrewdness, the meaning of the oracle escapes him and thus he fails to heed the warning. In fairness to him, one must say that the prediction needs to be interpreted in an impossibly subtle way, if it is to be understood correctly. This is precisely the kind of pitfall that Greek mythology allots to Croesus and many other unwitting victims of the subtle

¹³⁶ Jules Michelet, *Histoire de France* 4.1: *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Paul Viallaneix (Paris 1971 —) IV 396. The devil personally appears in Santa Croce di Gerusalemme to claim his prey, and only in the accompanying footnote is the "legend" of Gerbert characterized as one of the great "myths" of the Middle Ages.

¹³⁷ Mario Bacchiega, *Silvestro II, papa e mago* (Foggia 1981). Gillette Ziegler, *Gerbert, le Pape de l'an mil* (Paris 1975). Bacchiega places much emphasis on the magic Gerbert was taught in Cordova and credits a "golem" with fortelling the pope's end in Santa Croce di Gerusalemme (pp. 20-25, 37, 75-81, 123-26, 137-39). Ziegler's book is a kind of historical novel. The author claims to have seriously consulted the source material, but she has Gerbert and other Benedictines wearing brown (!) cowls and later has him work in the Vatican (!) Library, which is, however, poorly endowed in comparison with Cordova (pp. 34-36, 47-65, 231).

oracles of the Delphic Pythia.¹³⁸ Some-one like Benno of Osnabrück, who was familiar with Rome and papal protocol, must have used this model to fashion Gerbert's fatal prediction. A clever Roman may also have invented, or more likely adapted, the tale of the statue on the Campo Marzio. The statue bears an inscription inviting the reader to strike at a certain point. Again, the obvious interpretation proves useless. On this occasion, however, Gerbert smartly discovers the hidden meaning of the instruction and is led to a magic cave. Caves of the 'sesame-open' type occur frequently in medieval literature,¹³⁹ and there is no reason to disbelieve William of Malmesbury, who claimed that he had learned about Gerbert's adventures from oral sources. The specific story of the statue and the cave soon continued its migration; other twelfth-century sources no longer connect it with Gerbert.¹⁴⁰ Finally, recalling the popess Joan, we can say that both Joan and Pope Sylvester join countless heroes of legends and folk tales, who are helped by the devil, or at least a demon, to achieve their goals. In both these cases medieval writers seem to have had a hard time deciding whether in the end the Evil one could claim his prey or whether a conversion *in extremis* was to open the way to salvation. It would seem, though, that the male pope had a better chance to escape Hell than the female impostor. Both, finally, have their secrets epitomized in a mysterious alliterating hexameter.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ King Croesus of Lydia asked whether he should make war on the neighbouring Persian kingdom. The oracle advised him that by crossing the frontier river Halys he would destroy a great empire. He crossed the Halys and lost his own kingdom, together with the war. See H.W. Parke and D.E.W. Wormell, *The Delphic Oracle* (Oxford 1956) II nr. 53. For other oracles not understood correctly see e.g. I 314 (II nr. 406), I 356 (II nr. 389), I 408 (II nr. 436), I 411f. (II nr. 129). Another typical example is King Aegeus of Athens who consulted the oracle about his childlessness. He was told not to "loose the projecting end of his leather bottle" before his return to Athens. He did not understand that he was advised to remain continent on his homeward journey. So, when passing through Troezen, he fathered Theseus, who later inadvertently caused his father's death (ibid. I 300, II nr. 110).

¹³⁹ Graf, *Roma nella memoria* cit. 119-42. Graf suggests that this peculiar tale may have originated in the Arabic world.

¹⁴⁰ See Oldoni, "Gerberto ..." cit. *Studi medievali* 3rd series 21 (1980) 554-62. In two continuations to the chronicles of Sigebert of Gembloux and Vincent of Beauvais, the discovery of the cave is attributed to a Saracen slave of Robert Guiscard. He recovers the treasure and uses it to buy his freedom. In the *Gesta Romanorum* (ch. 107, ed. Oesterley cit. 438-40), the discoverer is a nameless cleric who, once inside the cave, cannot find the exit and perishes miserably.

¹⁴¹ Benno of Osnabrück epitomizes Gerbert's career in terms of his three episcopal sees: "*Transit ab R Gerbertus ad R post papa viget R.*" Initials that pose a riddle are also used in the Sibylline oracles endlessly repeated throughout the Middle Ages; see below p. 128f. For the popess see above p. 106f.

In the genesis of Gerbert's legend, anti-papal spite would seem to have coincided with the application of migratory myths to objects of local Roman interest. At any rate, it may be impossible now to decide which came first. What is clear, though, is that anti-papal sentiment kept this specific legend alive, as it did in other cases discussed in this chapter. When rational critique should have triumphed, deeply seated emotions often proved invincible. What is perhaps even more intriguing, though, is the survival of the magus type itself in the guise of various historical transformations. Already a contemporary of Gerbert's, Adalbero of Laon, had likened him to Nectanabis, the Egyptian king gifted with inscrutable knowledge, who lived on in the legends of Alexander.¹⁴² Moreover — and Michelet may have been the first to point this out — something of Gerbert lives on in Doctor Faust, the magus endowed with infinite and incomprehensible knowledge that can lead to either destruction or salvation. Faust, like Gerbert before him, would seem to belong to Hell and Heaven at the same time. Which of the two final destinies will claim them at the end is somewhat accidental. Another legacy that Gerbert passes on to Faust is the power of erotic seduction — a power first assigned to him by William of Malmesbury and Walter Map. As the two English writers tell the story, infatuation and magic knowledge appear to be intricately connected. Which came first is not easy to say; and the same ambiguity pertains again to Faust.

Most of the legends discussed in this chapter evolved over a considerable period of time. Some of them reach back to a time very near the historical events they were designed to adorn. The case of the popess Joan is different and rather rare, although by no means unique.¹⁴³ Her legend seems to spring to life rather suddenly, four centuries after the bogus date assigned to her in the list of the popes, and three centuries after the historical incidents that may have suggested the tale. Throughout this chapter we have uncovered three major incentives for the creation of *fabula* in the Middle Ages. Two of them were intended to improve *historia*'s qualifications as the *vitae magistra*, who taught moral conduct by presenting the examples of the past. One was the application of ideological bias; we have called this the satirical approach. The other was a desire to clarify the meaning

¹⁴² Oldoni, "Gerberto ..." cit. *Studi medievali* 3rd series 24 (1983) 167-91. For the tradition of Nectanabis see also John Gower (1330-1408), *Confessio amantis* 6.1789-2366.

¹⁴³ See below p. 403f.

of history; this we have called the retouching approach. The third tendency, by contrast, is not inspired by a specific design; and it is this latter, the uninhibited play of fantasy, that best characterizes the medieval approach to history. It should be emphasized again that the primary purpose of this chapter was not systematic analysis, but a demonstration, however modest and restricted, of the freewheeling curiosity and the powerful imagination in which many medieval chroniclers excelled. Delight in the telling of tall tales and marvellous stories is universal, of course. What distinguishes the medieval approach, though, is the prevalent orientation towards historical topics and figures. The Greeks, by contrast, had tended to apply their boundless curiosity primarily to natural phenomena and the Arabo-Persian tradition favoured fairy tales, that is to say, pure fiction rather than historical fiction. In a direct way, medieval *fabula* owed little as yet to Greek mythology — a situation that was to change with the coming of the Renaissance — but it certainly did share in the debt that medieval historians owed to the Judaeo-biblical chronicle tradition. None of the historical myths and legends of the Middle Ages achieved the classical omnipresence of an *Odyssey* or even the Flood myth. Quite a few, however, and not only those of popular saints, survived the assaults of Renaissance critics and, with various degrees of vigour, continued their march towards modern times. The next chapter will present one more strand of medieval mythistory that submitted to mutations but for a very long time resisted extinction.

CHAPTER THREE

GOG, MAGOG AND THE LATTER-DAY EMPEROR

I

Judaeo-Christian Eschatology

Eschatology provided another opening for *fabula* in the historical world view of the Middle Ages, and a rather unusual one. Neither the ancient Greeks nor the Romans were greatly interested in the end of the world and the future portion of human history leading up to that end. Likewise, after the Middle Ages, the historians of the Renaissance period showed little taste for the final events lying veiled in the future. They even tended to avoid writing universal chronicles. Finally, from the seventeenth century onward, doomsday was definitely considered to fall outside the scope of history. By contrast, the concept of universal history was popular in the Middle Ages and frequently led medieval chroniclers to pursue their investigation as far as the end of the world. It is peculiar to the Judaeo-Christian tradition of late Antiquity that the apocalypse was almost from the start an integral part of the historical concept — a place it would hold triumphantly throughout the Middle Ages in Jewish, Christian and Islamic literature.

The development of apocalypticism is attributed to the Jews of a “Messianic” age straddling the birth of Christ by about three centuries on either side. Whether the first impulses were carried forward from the earlier Jewish tradition or borrowed from the Iranians is a question that need not concern us. There is, however, an important difference between the Jewish apocalyptic thinkers of the Messianic period and their Christian heirs in the Middle Ages. Medieval apocalypticism tended to be aligned to historical thinking and was generally receptive to the *fabula* aspects of medieval historiography, whereas the preceding Jewish apocalypticists were primarily gnostics, motivated by a thirst for universal knowledge rather than a pragmatic desire to

connect specific events in the present and the past.¹ Unlike the Old-Testament prophets, who had eagerly looked forward to a final and grandiose phase of Israel's national history, the Jewish apocalyptic writers inclined toward a gnostic dualism that defied linear chronology. The aeon of the final events was separated from the aeon of past and current events, not by any measure of time, but by a metaphysical space. The advent of Christianity reversed this development. In large measure the Christian apocalyptic writers effected a return to the pragmatism of prophecy.

While eschatology is present in the canon of both the Jewish Bible and the Islamic Koran, it holds a privileged position in the Christian New Testament, mostly thanks to Matthew 24-25 and Revelation. Not only were the authors of the Christian Middle Ages always mindful of biblical precedent, they were also inspired by it to new flights of fancy. To begin with, however, the eschatological sections of the New Testament stimulated sound reasoning rather than wild speculation. Christ himself, according to Matthew's account, had used sober terms, when he instructed his disciples privately about the last times. Revelation, on the other hand, described the final days of the world and of time in breathtaking images and allegories. Initially, at least, they proved too powerful and compelling to invite imitation. So the medieval reader was challenged at first to comprehend that rich symbolism in terms of facts and events. No one could doubt that Revelation, fantastic as it seemed, was a factual account of future events; the Word of God could not be other than truthful.

The eschatological sections of the New Testament could draw inspiration from the Old. The historical interpretation of eschatological mysteries must have been popular among the Jews of the Messianic period. It was greatly encouraged by the Book of Daniel (composed c.165 B.C.), the only major writing in the Jewish canon that is extensively eschatological. At the climax of the apocalyptic events, the role of the Messianic saviour is assigned to Michael, "one of the chief princes" and "the great captain." This Michael, who unlike the later Christian archangel is not as yet visibly endowed with metaphysical characteristics, must be taken to be a historical figure of the future. His intervention is preceded by other events at first described in terms of mysteries, but subsequently identified with the iniquitous rule of the

¹ *Apokalyptik*, ed. Klaus Koch and Johann Michael Schmidt, *Wege der Forschung* vol. 365 (Darmstadt 1982) 21ff. and passim. In general also Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End. Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York 1979).

kings of Media, Persia and Greece. This sets an important pattern for future historical prophecies. Events leading up to the apocalypse are identified with past and verifiable history. Therefore, they vouch for the historical verity of the final things to come.² The prophetic Books of Haggai and Zechariah assign to one Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, a role that resembles that of Michael in the Book of Daniel, but is rather more modest and pragmatic. The apocryphal Books of Esdras, which associate peoples rather than individuals with the eschatological events, also invite historical interpretation according to the pattern set out in Daniel.

While visibly attracted to allegorization, the Christian Fathers continued this tradition of historical reasoning. They developed their method of fourfold interpretation of Scripture. Its literal meaning apart, a text could be explained allegorically in three ways, and among these the *sensus historicus* always retained its significance. It called for the text to be taken as the allegory of a factual event or person. The *sensus historicus* was persistently applied by Jerome (331-419) in his commentary on Daniel, until he reached the prophet's final visions in chapters 11 and 12. There Jerome parted company with the pagan interpreter Porphyry (232-305), who in his treatise *Contra Christianos* (now lost) had pointed to Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the suppressor of the Maccabean rebellion, as one of the kings foretold by Daniel's prophecies. By contrast, Jerome himself related them to the Antichrist. Although in this case Jerome did not support the historical interpretation, he continued to present it faithfully and in detail. He admitted that, contrary to his own view, many Christians considered Antiochus, and also Domitian and Nero, as prefigurations of Antichrist in the same way as Solomon was the prefiguration of Christ.³ To dwell on Nero's case for a moment, the ground for his repeated appearance was prepared outside the Christian communities. The original reports about Nero's death did not tally and could easily be written off as unproven rumours, especially as it took many months for a creditable successor to emerge in the person of Vespasian. As happened in the case of other deceased rulers,⁴ men pretending to be

² Daniel 8.1-25, 10.13, 11.1, 12.1-3.

³ Jerome, *In Daniele* 4.11.21ff. (*De Antichristo*): CC S 75A.914-21. Although Jerome questions the often repeated identification of the two kings in Daniel 11.27 with Antiochus IV Epiphanes and Ptolemy V Epiphanes, he does not seem to see that it is based upon a confusion between Antiochus III and Antiochus IV.

⁴ See below p. 138f.

Nero continued to appear for decades and to find a following.⁵ Augustine fully shared Jerome's reservations. He firmly denounced those who related 2 Thessalonians 2.7 to Nero, claiming either that he had never died or that he would be resurrected as Antichrist.⁶ Nero, nevertheless, continued to be seen both as a prefiguration of Antichrist and the fulfillment of Antichrist prophecies. When Haimo of Auxerre (d. c. 855) expounded the verse in 2 Thessalonians, he explained that Nero had been an incarnation of Antichrist hidden in mystery, much as Abel, Isaac and David had prefigured Christ, and that by Nero all Roman emperors down to the last were to be understood.⁷

We shall have to return to this point later on, for it is here that the Christian medieval tradition broke with the Jewish precedent. To say that Antichrist, under a veil, was present already in Nero was in keeping with that precedent, but the Jews would not say, as many Christians did according to Jerome, that, under a veil, the Messiah was present already in Solomon. And to reverse the comparison, which means to say that the Messiah was simply a reincarnation of the historical Solomon or David, would have sounded sacrilegious in the ears of most Jews in the Christian era.⁸ Such a reversal, however, is precisely what the Christian apocalyptic writers were to undertake. Before we turn to the nascent myth of the emperor redivivus, however, we need to look at another major exercise in mythmaking that helped mould the substance of eschatological history.

The story of Gog and Magog begins in Genesis 10.2, where Magog is listed among the sons of Japheth. Similarly 1 Chronicles 5.4 mentions a Gog, son or grandson of Joel. Numbers 21.33-5 and

⁵ See Suetonius, *Nero* 57; Tacitus, *Historiae* 2.8-9; Cassius Dio 63.9.3, 66.19.3c; Johannes Zonaras, *Annales* 11.18 (PG 134.975f.)

⁶ 2 Thessalonians 2.7: "*Nam mysterium iam operatur iniquitatis; tandem ut qui tenet nunc teneat donec de medio fiat.*" Cf. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 20.19.

⁷ Haimo of Auxerre, *Expositio in Epistolam II Pauli ad Thessalonicenses*, PL 117.780f.

⁸ It is true that Ezekiel 37.15-28 prophesies that the lost tribes of Israel (cf. below p. 127) will be led back from their exile and reunited with Judah. Under a new King David they will live for ever in prosperity. "They shall live in the land which I gave my servant Jacob, the land where your fathers lived. They and their descendants shall live for ever, and my servant David shall for ever be their prince" (Ezekiel 37.25; cf. Jeremiah 30.9). In the Old Testament canon this promise is isolated. It was apparently not interpreted in eschatological terms until Jewish apocalypticism gained some strength. An example of that new approach is in the *Book of Zerubbabel*, composed in the early seventh century. An Antichrist-like Roman king (sometimes equated with Jesus) defeats and kills the Messiah ben Joseph and in turn is overcome by the apocalyptic Messiah ben David. See *Apokalyptik*, ed. K. Koch and J.M. Schmidt cit., 2, 347 and passim. *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem 1971 -) 11.412f., 16.1002.

Deuteronomy 3.1-13 tell of Gog, king of Bashan, whom God delivered into the hands of Moses. With Ezekiel, eschatological expectation enters the fray. "*In die illa*," on that future and final day, Yahweh will unleash Gog, a prince in the land of Magog "in the far recesses of the north." Gog will come with a great host, all riding on horses. "Like a cloud covering the earth," they will fall upon the people of Israel, "living quiet and undisturbed, undefended by walls, with neither gates nor bars." Gog and his hordes expect to wreak utter destruction; but also "*in die illa, in die adventus Gog super terram Israel*" the Lord's wrath will boil over, and they will meet their fate amid universal terror, earthquakes, hailstones hard as rock and similar tribulations. "In that day I will give to Gog [instead of] a burial ground in Israel, the valley of Abarim east of the [Dead] Sea. There they shall bury Gog and all his horde, and all of Abarim will be blocked; and they shall call it the Valley of Gog's Horde."⁹

It is not clear when this particular part of Ezekiel was composed. Some modern scholars are inclined to see in Gog and Magog a reflection of Scythian raids westward, perhaps as far as Palestine, in the seventh century B.C. Indeed, Josephus Flavius shows that in the first century B.C. the Scyths were in Jewish circles commonly associated with Gog and Magog. By combining two passages in Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities* (1.123 and 18.97) with one in his *Jewish War* (7.244-51), we can reconstruct the tale that must have circulated in his time. Magog, a son of Japheth, was the founding father of the Magogai, better known as the Scyths. Living in the region of the Tanais and the Maotic marshes, the Scyths were — that much is historical fact — a nation of nomadic horsemen and raiders. On one occasion they defeated one of the generals of Alexander the Great. To prevent further intrusions, Alexander locked them up in their homeland by barring their passage through the Caucasus mountains with iron gates.¹⁰ In Roman times a Scythian tribe, the Alans, were planning another plundering expedition into Armenia, Media and countries beyond. They found an accomplice in the person of a neighbouring king, who was himself fighting against the Romans. He

⁹ Ezekiel 38.1-6, 9-12, 14-16, 18-22; 39.11. For the following section, see Friedrich Pfister's article on Gog and Magog in *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, ed. Bächtold-Stäubli cit. 3.910-18.

¹⁰ Friedrich Pfister (cf. preceding note) draws attention to a wall that he says existed near Derbent on the eastern rim of the Caucasus, and to some passes across the Caucasus that were barricaded.

let the Alans loose by unlocking Alexander's gates. They devastated Armenia and Media and then withdrew again to their homes beyond the Caucasus. Josephus calls the Scythian ally King Artabanus — in fact the name of a Parthian dynasty — or king of Hyrcania. What matters for our purposes is that he not only identified Alexander as the builder of the iron gates, but also established the historical identity of the ruthless prince, who unlocked them again.

Around the beginning of the Christian era, a version of this tale composed in the Jewish circles of Alexandria¹¹ appears to have added some lavish detail to the narrative. It is not known to exist now but seems to have inspired both Pseudo-Callisthenes, whose text became seminal for the further migrations of the legend in the Orient, and Pseudo-Methodius, the source of the medieval tradition in the West. From the Greek version of the Alexander legend authored by Pseudo-Callisthenes, the tale of Gog and Magog travelled to Syria, and from a Syrian version it found its way into the Koran. Suras 18 and 21 state that the unlocking of Alexander's gates and the onslaught of Gog and Magog will be accomplished to the sound of the doomsday trumpet.

A survey of Gog's and Magog's progress in the West must begin with the Book of Revelation. The last book of the New Testament canon is often thought to have been composed in the later years of Emperor Domitian (d. 96 A.D.), when the Christian communities were exposed to a measure of persecution. Revelation may thus be roughly contemporary with the writings of Josephus. It certainly is very close to the spirit and imagery of Jewish apocalyptic writings. Gog and Magog appear in a context (Rev. 20.1-10) that owes inspiration to both Daniel and Ezekiel. Satan (or the Dragon) has been chained by an angel coming down from heaven and remains locked up in a dungeon for a thousand years. When the thousand years are over he will be let loose.

¹¹ Josephus offers a famous and fanciful description of Alexander's approach to Jerusalem. The great king prostrates himself before the high priest, on whose mitre he sees the name of the true God inscribed. Subsequently he visits the Temple and sacrifices under the direction of the high priest. He also grants the Jews all they ask for. See *Antiquitates Judaicae* 11.329-39. Josephus also reports friendly collaboration between the Jews and Alexander; they support his side against the Egyptians, and he permits them to settle in his city of Alexandria under favourable terms. See *De bello Judaico* 2.487. According to another Jewish legend, Alexander even took the bones of Jeremiah to Alexandria.

He will come out to seduce the nations in the four quarters of the earth and to muster them for battle, yes, the hosts of Gog and Magog, countless as the sands of the sea. So they marched over the breadth of the land and laid siege to the camp of God's people and the city that he loves. But fire came down from Heaven and consumed them; and the Devil, their seducer, was flung into a lake of fire and sulphur ... (20.8-10).

From the biblical beginnings of the Western tradition, Gog and Magog were thus firmly established as the leaders of pernicious hordes, bursting forth on that uncertain final day of doom. Their defeat was attributed to a superhuman agency. The reader was led beyond the reaches of human history; yet, as in Daniel and Ezekiel, a chronological term was specified, albeit one that rather suggested an indefinite lapse of time. If, however, Revelation was read in conjunction other apocalyptic passages of the Bible which offered more specific dates, it was bound to encourage historical interpretations.¹²

Gog, Magog, their jailor and their liberator, all needed to be identified with historical characters; and the task was taken up without delay. It is true that Augustine, once again, forcefully resisted historical identifications. The thousand years of Revelation 20, he submitted, referred in symbolical language to Christ's church, while Gog and Magog were symbolical names for all persecutors the church was bound to encounter along its earthly path. Augustine gave short shrift to those who, seduced by identical initials, were pointing to the Getae and Massagetae of Thracia.¹³ We can conclude that already in Augustine's time Revelation had become a prey to the unravellers of historical fact. Although his powerful influence through the centuries must have dissuaded many from joining in, their numbers kept growing. Josephus was known very widely throughout the Middle Ages, as is confirmed by the large number of surviving manuscripts

¹² It is true that Christ himself, according to Matthew 24.36, had issued an unmistakable warning against the urge to calculate the length of time between the present and the apocalypse: "But about that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in Heaven, not even the Son; only the Father." But despite Augustine's persistent rejection of such calculations, the urge to comprehend the millennium in terms of historical events and chronological dates proved irresistible to many. See Martin Haeusler, *Das Ende der Geschichte in der mittelalterlichen Weltchronistik* (Cologne-Vienna 1980) 21f. and passim; Richard Kenneth Emmerson, *Antichrist in the Middle Ages. A study of Medieval Apocalypticism, Art and Literature* (Seattle 1981).

¹³ Aurelius Augustinus, *De civitate Dei* 20.9, 11.

of a Latin translation and a Latin reworking of the *Jewish War*, attributed to one Hegesippus. We have seen that Josephus had created a model for historical identification; this could easily be adapted to other settings. St. Ambrose (d. 397) identified Gog with the Goths, while Jerome (d. 420) mentioned others, who preferred the Scyths.¹⁴ Jordanes (d. c. 555), the author of the first surviving history of the Goths, cited Josephus' placing of Magog among the Scyths and suggested that the latter were actually the Goths. In connection with the Amazons, who also were of Gothic stock, he mentioned Alexander's gates in the Caucasus.¹⁵ The Byzantine historian Procopius of Caesarea (d. after 562), in *De bello Persico* (1.10), recognized the Huns as the nation locked out by Alexander. But he also saw them as the keepers of the gates he had built. When Attila and his Huns swept across the Rhine and into Italy (451-52), they touched off an exceptionally rich tradition of legends and courtly fiction that often relied on divine intervention to explain the sudden end of that menace.¹⁶

In the middle of the seventh century, the Burgundian monk Fredegar reported the tale with an intriguing twist. Fredegar's chronicle makes no use of the names of Gog and Magog, but who else could be meant by the ferocious tribes of savages that lived beyond the Caucasus? They had been locked up by Alexander the Great behind the Caspian gates made of iron and remained confined there until the time of the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius (610-41). "Precisely these gates were opened on the orders of Heraclius, and out poured 150 000 fighters and their auxiliaries, hired for gold to join the war against the Saracens." Both sides prepare for a decisive battle, but at the eve of the engagement "the sword of God" visits Heraclius' camp, and 52000 soldiers die. While the Saracens are advancing towards Jerusalem Heraclius, himself renounces his Christian faith and dies of

¹⁴ Ambrosius, *De fide* 2.16 (PL 16.588). Hieronymus, *Commentarius in Hiezechielem* 11.38 (CC SL 75.525).

¹⁵ Jordanes, *Getica* 29, 50f., ed. Theodor Mommsen in MGH AA 5.61, 67. Isidore of Seville (d. 636) repeated the association between Gog and Magog, the Scyths and the Goths, referring specifically to Ezekiel; see *Historia Gothorum* 1, ed. Theodor Mommsen in MGH AA 11.268, and Andrew Runni Anderson, *Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog, and the Inclosed Nations* (Cambridge, Mass. 1932) 8ff.

¹⁶ Alessandro d'Ancona, *Studj di critica e storia letteraria* (Bologna 1880) 361-500.

despair, thus paying the penalty for his heresy and an incestuous marriage.¹⁷

Several strands of factual history remain dimly visible behind Fredegar's amalgam of legendary features. Syria and Palestine, with Damascus and Jerusalem, fell to the Arabs in the three years following Heraclius' decisive defeat on the banks of the Yarmuk (636). Heraclius favoured Monotheletism, was married to his niece, and died early in 641 after a severe illness. Now, although Fredegar has Heraclius succumbing on account of his grave sins, the Byzantine emperor obviously fought in a good cause. He opposed the Saracens, circumcised descendants of Hagar, who were a race of ravagers and destroyers, much like the wild folk from behind the iron gates. Indeed, they came "from the slopes of Mount Caucasus above the Caspian Sea," just like the latter. Before long, the Saracens would traumatize the Christian world in that they destroyed Jerusalem and conquered most of the Byzantine Empire. It thus follows that Heraclius' auxiliaries from behind the iron gates, despite their despicable nature, fought in defence of Christendom, not against it. Centuries would pass before another writer was to grant Gog and Magog even that much grudging respect.

We need not follow in detail the manifold migrations of Gog and Magog through medieval literature. Writers continued to identify them with just such intruders and assailants of the Roman Empire and Christendom as were uppermost in their minds. What to Josephus were the Scyths, to Jordanes the Goths and to Procopius the Huns, had become to Fredegar the Arabs. In a friendlier vein, Adam of Bremen (d. after 1080) argued that God's fire sent upon Magog (Ezekiel 39.6) did not refer to the Gothic sack of Rome, as many thought, but to the Christianization of Sweden.¹⁸ In the Renaissance it became fashionable to trace one's origins back to Noah. In such genealogical Marathon races Gog or Magog, along with Japheth and Gomer, would often take their place in the pristine lineage from which all Germanic tribes were descended.

¹⁷ Fredegar 4.66, 81, also for what follows here, in *Quellen zur Geschichte des 7. und 8. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Andreas Kusternig (Darmstadt 1982) 232f., 254f.

¹⁸ Adam Bremensis, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* 1.26, in *Quellen des 9. und 11. Jahrhunderts*, ed. W. Trillmich and R. Buchner cit., 198-201.

II

The Mongols and Prester John

More interesting than Gog's Germanic offspring, however, is his Semitic one. The Old Testament reports three instances when large numbers of Jews were led away to captivity by conquerors from the north. Later generations were particularly prone to speculate about the reports of the Assyrian exile, now datable to 722/21 B.C. and thought to have involved the deportation of up to thirty thousand Jews. This ordeal was inflicted upon the ten tribes of the Kingdom of Israel (as distinguished from the small Kingdom of Judah), because they had worshipped the two golden calves of Jeroboam and sinned in many other ways (2 Kings 17.6, 16-23; cf. 10.28). It was widely believed that the "lost tribes" had retained their Jewish identity "to this day" (1 Chronicles 5.26; James 1) and would eventually return (Isaiah 11.11; Jeremiah 31.8-9). This expectation is also expressed in the Book of Ezekiel; close by we find some frankly eschatological passages predicting the arrival of Gog and Magog from the recesses of the north.¹⁹ Sooner or later, Gog and Magog were bound to be identified with the lost tribes, especially in the light of Ezekiel 39.6, which could be taken to indicate the future conversion of Magog to the worship of Yahweh.²⁰ We need not concern ourselves here with other identifications of the lost tribes of Israel. Down through the centuries they were also discovered in Japan, Britain, Afghanistan and even in America, among the Indians of the northern prairies as well as those of the southern Cordilleras.²¹ Another strand of the tradition must be discussed, however; in conjunction with Gog and Magog it identified the lost tribes with the Mongols. It is here that we encounter Prester John, who will lead us to the myth of the Latter Day Emperor.

The appearance of the Mongols in the twelfth century caused shock-waves in the minds of Europeans. In their state of confusion they eagerly turned to a tradition of unfettered eschatology that had

¹⁹ Ezekiel 37.19-21, 38.1-16.

²⁰ Anderson, *Alexander's Gate* cit., ch. 3. Orosius (3.7) pointed out that Ochus (i.e. Artaxerxes III, 362-39 B.C.) forced a great many Jews to migrate to Hyrcania near the Caspian Sea, and that according to common belief they were still there, increasing all the time, and would break forth one day.

²¹ *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem 1971 -) 15.1003-6, and the literature quoted there.

been around for quite a while. It was fed by two prophecies; the first was attributed to the Tiburtine Sibyl, and the other to St. Methodius of Patara, a fourth-century martyr.²² While the Sibyl offers some scope for historical identification, Pseudo-Methodius is too confused and mysterious for such an approach. Both prophecies, however, amid a plethora of tedious and abstruse detail, eventually lead up to very similar accounts of the ultimate times. According to Pseudo-Methodius, the seed of Ishmael (i.e. the Muslims) will subject the whole world to a rule of unsufferable iniquity. But they will be vanquished by a *rex Gregorum sive Romanorum*, whose reign of peace will be marked by universal harmony, joy and prosperity. The peace will be disrupted, however, when the gates of Alexander are opened. Gog, Magog and the other despicable tribes will burst forth and cause great tribulations. But the Roman King will destroy them and continue to rule the world from Jerusalem. At the coming of the *filius perditionis* (i.e. Antichrist), he will lay down his crown upon Christ's cross at Golgatha. The cross will ascend to heaven and the king will expire. Finally the power of Antichrist will come to an end when the Son of Man returns to sit in judgement. The Sibyl does not identify the powers of iniquity vanquished by the King of the Romans and Greeks. On the other hand, she names the latter; he is called Constans. The onslaught of Gog and Magog is placed directly in the era of Antichrist, who at first engages in clandestine subversion. The Roman King defeats Gog and Magog and then lays down his crown in Jerusalem. The *Imperium Romanum* ceases to exist; Antichrist openly rules the world from the Temple in Jerusalem. When Elijah and Enoch return to announce the Second Coming, he kills them. But then, on the Mount of Olives, Antichrist himself is slain by the Archangel Michael and Christ comes to sit in judgement.

The Tiburtine Sibyl had occasion to foretell the end of the world, when she was called upon to explain a dream of nine suns simultaneously dreamed by a hundred Roman senators. Her exposition is confusing and monotonous; amid a sprinkling of factual historical clues, she strings together periods of universal history, each of them dominated by a ruler, who is identified merely by the first letter of his name. Its artlessness notwithstanding, the scheme proved highly

²² Both texts, and other ones related to them, are critically edited in a classic study by Ernst Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte und Forschungen. Pseudomethodius, Adso und die Tiburtinische Sibylle* (Halle a/S 1898). For the following, see especially 72-75, 88-96, 185-87. McGinn, *Visions of the End* cit. 70-73, 82-87.

successful. For centuries readers visibly liked the challenge of this historical puzzle and continued to update it by adding the initials of later rulers. Yet, by and large, the resulting wave of speculation is irrelevant to our inquiry. Over time, Pseudo-Methodius and the Sibyl combined with the Joachite prophecies²³ to encourage wild eschatological fancies and a fair amount of radical sectarian action. But all of this did little to promote historical thought; nor did it produce historical fancy. Steeped in confusing mysteries, it invited muddled emotionalism rather than the need for clarity and rational meaning, which is such a prominent source of both, *historia* and *fabula*. We must look to the greatest historical mind of the twelfth century to lead us back to more fertile ground for our investigation.

Bishop Otto of Freising (d. 1158) devoted the entire last book of his *Chronica* to Antichrist and the end of the world. Inspired by Augustine's restraint, he ignored Pseudo-Methodius and the Tiburtine Sibyl. He mentioned the tradition of Nero redivivus in passing, but was clearly more inclined to see in the *filius perditionis* of 2 Thessalonians 2 none other than the devil.²⁴ Antichrist, who is "the false prophet" (Rev. 19.20), the deceiver of the faithful, will be assisted by "the beast." The beast, Otto thought, might well be the final emperor, a brutal potentate of low birth.²⁵ As if Otto's marked coolness towards the Pseudo-Methodius tradition needed further confirmation, Gog and Magog are not once mentioned in this context. Only near the beginning of his work, when dealing with Noah's offspring, Otto quoted Josephus' statement that Magog was the progenitor of the Scyths.²⁶ Otto's entire treatise on Antichrist was rather too philosophical and discriminating to become widely influential. He was the last to carry forward the old tradition that presented the final emperor, whether he be Nero redivivus or another, as a sinister jackal of Antichrist. The future belonged entirely to that shining counterpart announced by the Sibyl, the latter-day emperor ruling the world throughout a millennium of peace and justice.

²³ Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages. A study of Joachimism* (Oxford 1969) 299-303 and passim.

²⁴ Otto of Freising, *Chronica sive historia de duobus civitatibus* 8.2. There is an ed. by Walther Lammers with a German transl. by Adolf Schmidt (Darmstadt 1960). Cf. Haeusler, *Das Ende der Geschichte* cit. 35-37.

²⁵ Otto of Freising, *Chronica* cit. 8.2-3.

²⁶ Otto of Freising, *Chronica* cit. 1.4.

In another respect Otto stands at the beginning, rather than the end, of a tradition. To him we owe the earliest and probably most famous account of Prester John. The year was 1145; the West had just been shocked by alarming news from the Crusader states in the Orient. On Christmas Eve of the preceding year, mighty Edessa (Urfa) had been reconquered by the Seljuks. Otto was present when Pope Eugenius III received in Viterbo a delegation of the Syrian and Armenian churches that included one Bishop Hugh of Jabala (Jubayl). Hugo intended to cross the Alps and seek military assistance from Emperor Conrad III, who was Otto's nephew. The Syrian embassy must indeed have played a minor role in the making of the Second Crusade (1145-49), on which Otto was to accompany his uncle. In Viterbo, then, Otto heard from the lips of Bishop Hugh a strange tale. Not long ago a king-and-priest (*rex et sacerdos*) from the extreme Orient beyond Persia and Armenia had summoned his nation of Nestorian Christians and attacked the Persians and the Medes. After a bloody victory this *Presbyter Johannes*, as he was called, pressed on to bring relief to the church of Jerusalem. But he was unable to cross the Tigris and therefore followed the river in a northerly direction. He hoped to reach a point where it would freeze over in the winter and thus permit his army to cross. He waited several years, but the weather remained unusually mild. No ice formed, and in the end he was forced to return home. Prester John's determination to rescue the Holy Land was inspired by his descent from the Three Magi. Only the weather had at this time thwarted his intention to proceed to Jerusalem.²⁷

It is generally assumed that bits of the story Bishop Otto was given were a garbled account of recent events. In 1141 the recently established Mongol dominion of Qara Khitai, Buddhist for the most part, with a Nestorian minority, defeated Sultan Sanjar with his Muslim Seljuks on the Qatvan steppe near Samarkand. Other parts of Otto's account, however, belong to a tradition of uncertain age and multiple ancestry, which is best represented by the letter that Prester John purportedly wrote to one of his counterparts in the West. It had a much larger readership than Otto's chronicle; down to the sixteenth century it remained in circulation. We know versions in Latin and Hebrew, as well as medieval Italian, French, Provençal, Castilian, German and English. Many were addressed either to a pope, sometimes called Eugenius, or to an emperor, sometimes called

²⁷ Otto of Freising, *Chronica* cit. 7.32f.

Manuel or Frederick.²⁸ These three names point to near-contemporaries of Otto of Freising, namely Eugenius III (ruled 1145-53), Manuel I Comnenus (ruled 1143-80) and Frederick I Barbarossa (ruled 1152-90). Further evidence also indicates that Prester John's letter began to be diffused by the middle of the twelfth century.²⁹ The great Investiture Contest that for so long had pitted secular against ecclesiastical authority was then still in living memory and the lesson of Prester John's empire could hardly be missed. No such conflict was possible there; the ruler was also the supreme pontiff and all his chief officials combined secular functions and titles with ecclesiastical ones.³⁰

The various versions of Prester John's letter also contain a good deal of material derived from much older sources than the current rumours seeping slowly down from the distant East. Among the many elements of classical lore regularly encountered are the Amazons,³¹ who belong to the numerous races over which Prester John holds sway. Other traits of myth are derived from Jewish traditions. Josephus had told of a river called Sabbatikos, which only flows on the sabbath and remains completely dry for the other six days.³² In the Rabbinic tradition its properties were reversed; it flows throughout the week, but like the Creator rests on the sabbath. In this way it could become an impenetrable barrier for the lost tribes of Israel. As

²⁸ See *The Hebrew Letters of Prester John*, ed. Edward Ullendorff and C.F. Beckingham (Oxford 1982), editing three Hebrew versions with English translation and an appendix of Latin, French and Italian versions already in print. There is also excellent introductory material, a bibliography and a convenient Index of Motifs and Themes. The classic study is by Friedrich Zarncke, *Der Priester Johannes* (Leipzig 1879). As late as the early sixteenth century, a version of the letter was inserted into a Castilian chapbook relating the travels of the Portuguese Infante Dom Pedro; see Francis M. Rogers, *The Travels of the Infante Dom Pedro of Portugal* (Cambridge, Mass. 1961) 150-53.

²⁹ In the chronicle of Alberic of Troisfontaines (begun about 1232) reference to the letter is made under the year 1165; see *The Hebrew Letters* cit. 3.

³⁰ Towards the end of the Latin text we read: "*Quare sublimitas nostra digniori quam presbiteratus nomine nuncupari se non permittat, non debet prudentia tua admirari. Plures enim in curia nostra ministeriales habemus, qui digniori nomine et officio, quantum ad ecclesiasticam dignitatem spectat, et etiam maiori quam nos in divinis officiis praediti sunt. Dapifer enim noster primas est et rex, pincerna noster archiepiscopus et rex, camerarius noster episcopus et rex, marescalcus noster rex et archimandrita, princeps cocorum rex et abbas. Et idcirco altitudo nostra non est passa se nominari eisdem nominibus aut ipsis ordinibus insigniri, quibus curia nostra plena esse videtur, et ideo minori nomine et inferiori gradu propter humilitatem magis elegit nuncupari*" (*The Hebrew Letters*, ed. Ullendorff and Beckingham cit. 198f.). In the same spirit the pope styles himself "*Servus servorum Dei*."

³¹ See above pp. 42-46.

³² Josephus Flavius, *De bello Judaico* 7.96-99.

it carries boulders rather than water, it cannot be crossed except on sabbath, when it rests, but then the Jews too by dint of their Mosaic laws are prevented from moving on.³³ The lost tribes appear in many versions as a parallel to, rather than an extension of, the Gog and Magog tale, but like the latter they often carry eschatological connotations. As if the stony river were not enough, Prester John must guard against them with strong garrisons, lest they break out and destroy the whole world. Gog and Magog themselves do not appear in all versions; when they do, they are located behind Alexander's gates and described as cannibals and fierce warriors. They will break forth at the time of Antichrist and do great harm until the Lord will defeat them with a rain of fire, hail and brimstones. Sometimes they are also ranged among Prester John's vassals; he uses them in his wars against the infidels. When not at war, he must rein them in tightly.³⁴

From his huge empire of the three Indias Prester John must wage wars on many fronts. Several versions of his letter emphasize his intention to go to Jerusalem. In true Crusader fashion, his projected journey is characterized both as a devout pilgrimage to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and as a military campaign to liberate the holy places and slay the enemies of the Christian faith. The latter, of course, can only be the Muslims. Here begins a strand of the myth of Prester John that was bound to lead back to the identification with contemporary events and personages. The defeat of the Muslim Sultan Sanjar in Central Asia was, as we have seen, a factor in the myth's formation. Its development, thereafter, was largely predicated upon the need for allies in the defence of the Holy Land against the Muslims. The existence of a mighty fellow-Christian power in the East was an electrifying thought, and so was, in particular, the prospect of a second, eastern front against the Muslim world that encircled occidental Christendom from Iberia to the Balkans.

In the early thirteenth century momentous news arrived from the eastern horizon of Christendom — news so confusing that at first it was hard to know whether one ought to be excited or deeply

³³ *The Hebrew Letters*, ed. Ullendorff and Beckingham cit. 56-58, 54f.

³⁴ *The Hebrew Letters*, ed. Ullendorff and Beckingham cit. 44-46, 80-82 and *passim*.

disturbed. It concerned the Mongols, or Tartars,³⁵ as their European contemporaries would eventually come to call them. To be digestible, these puzzling news had to be cast into a familiar mould, and for the time being, the myths of Prester John and Gog and Magog offered the best material. During the Damietta Crusade (1217-21) reports began to circulate in the Crusaders' camp that a Christian King David of India was on his way to assist the Franks and was defeating Muslim rulers left and right, as he approached. In March 1221 Pope Honorius III issued an encyclical relating the glad tidings he had received from Cardinal Pelagius of Albano, his legate with the Crusade. King David continued his victorious progress and by now was only ten days away from Baghdad.³⁶ Such were the first echoes of the westward sweep of Genghis Khan's armies; others were added soon, but this time they were apt to cause concern. Continuing his advance, King David had now crushed the Georgians. As the Georgians were a Christian people, this news did not bode well for David's commitment to Christian solidarity. Of course, the Georgians were schismatics; but so was King David himself, who was a Nestorian or a Jacobite. Jacques de Vitry, the Crusader bishop of Acre, remained optimistic. King David, who was more commonly called Prester John, was indeed "the hammer of the heathens and of perfidious Muhammad." One had to assume that the Georgians were made to pay for an alliance they had kept with the Muslim princes.³⁷

When Prester John entered the fray, Gog and Magog were normally not far behind. A Hungarian despatch to the West located the Tartar homeland "beyond the mountains," near Gog and Magog; another alluded to 1 Chronicle 5.26 and identified the Tartars with the

³⁵ It seems that the names "Tatars" or "Tartars" first reached the West in the wake of the Mongol invasion of Georgia and southern Russia, 1220-23. The name was connected with the Greek term "Tartarus" in an anonymous *Carmen de invasione Tartarorum* (1241/42), probably not for the first time. Giovanni da Piano Carpino begins the report of his Mongol mission (1245-47) with the words: "*Incipit hystoria Mongalorum quos nos Tartaros appellamus*"; see Gian Andri Bezzola, *Die Mongolen in abendländischer Sicht [1220-1270]* (Bern 1974) 31, 36, 59f., 105f., 125 and passim.

³⁶ Hans Eberhard Meyer, *The Crusades* tr. J. Gillingham (New York and Oxford 1972) 215-17. Bezzola, *Die Mongolen* cit. 13-28, also for what follows here.

³⁷ *Lettres de Jacques de Vitry*, ed. R.B.C. Huygens (Leiden 1960) 95f., 141-53 and passim. Especially letter VII, to be dated 18 April 1221, is important on account of the appended "*Excerpta de historia gestorum David regis Indorum, qui presbyter Iohannes a vulgo appellatur*." Its wide circulation in the West is indicated by the fact that five different addressees are known, among them Pope Honorius III, the University of Paris and "all friends in Christ" of the author.

lost tribe of Reuben, which had been deported by the Assyrians.³⁸ Writing between 1244 and c. 1256, Vincent of Beauvais disagreed; there was no trace of the Jewish tribes in Georgia. But he did identify the Mongols with one of the foul races that Alexander the Great had locked up. So did Vincent's contemporary, Rudolf of Ems, who had recourse to the seed of Ishmael to trace the Mongols back to Gog and Magog.³⁹

Factual information about the Mongols increased in proportion with their threat to Russia and Hungary. The dream of a great East-Western alliance against the Muslims faded and the myth of Prester John seemed doomed, at least for a while. Alberic of Troisfontaines began the compilation of his universal chronicle around 1232. He knew about Prester John's letter, but sadly concluded that it was superseded by the sober facts that he had learned about the Tartars. As he passed them on to his readers, he resolved the inevitable contradictions between his reports with a construction of his own. Prester John, alias King David, had indeed been on his way to Damietta, but when he learned that the Frankish Crusaders had lost the city, he returned to his homeland. Among his subjects were the barbaric Tartars. They staged a rebellion and slew him, putting their own king as a false Prester John in the place of the real. In Greater Armenia they had killed forty-two Christian bishops, and now it was rumoured that they were preparing to attack Hungary.⁴⁰ Matthew Paris, a learned Benedictine of St. Albans, continued working on his *Chronica maiora* until his death in 1259. He set great store by Pseudo-Methodius and the prophecies of the Sibyl, and thus he did not fail to assign to Gog and Magog their customary place in the apocalyptic events. He even inserted in his chronicle the text of a letter that Pope Alexander III had sent Prester John. But later, when adding detailed information about the Tartars from the Hungarian

³⁸ Bezzola, *Die Mongolen* cit. 44, 54.

³⁹ Anderson, *Alexander's Gate* cit. 71, 78f. Vincent of Beauvais (d. c. 1264), *Speculum quadruplex* (Douai 1624) IV: *Speculum historiale* 128f., 1215f. (books 4.43, 29.89). Vincent refers specifically to Petrus Comestor as his source for the rejected identification with the Jewish tribes (cf. above n. 20). Unlike some of his sources, he does not associate the lost tribes with Gog and Magog, nor with the eschatological events. Among the latter only the exploits of the "*filiis Ismael*" or "*Saraceni*" are mentioned: *ibid.* 1324 (book 31.107). Rudolf of Ems, *Alexander* ed. V. Junk (Leipzig 1928) verses 1473ff., 16790ff. This epic dates from shortly before the middle of the thirteenth century.

⁴⁰ Alberic of Troisfontaines, *Chronica*, ed. Paul Scheffer-Boichorst in MGH SS 23 (1874) 848f., 853f., 910-12, 941f. Bezzola, *Die Mongolen* cit. 57-63.; *The Hebrew Letters*, ed. Ullendorff and Beckingham cit. 3.

sources, he resisted the temptation to connect them with the eschatological Gog and Magog.⁴¹

In the 1240s and 1250s Pope Innocent IV and King Louis IX of France dispatched several embassies to the Mongol Great Khan. The envoys were Dominican and Franciscan friars, tough and courageous men, who set down their experiences in reports of Herodotean crispness. By and large they confirmed authoritatively that it was folly to hope for a helping hand from Prester John. There was no lack of schismatic Christians in the distant East, but they were scattered and impotent. Prester John belonged to a remote past. All agreed that he was dead and had been replaced by the ferocious and heathen Mongols. Some said he had been defeated and killed by them.⁴² Alexander's gates were understood as a geographical location, either one far away, or one the author had actually visited.⁴³ Shortly before 1249, Alexander Minorita (d. 1271) suggested that Christendom would no more be crushed by the Tartars than previously by the Arabs, the Parthians, the Medes and the Persians. The real afflictions, he thought, would probably not come until the time of Antichrist. Roughly two decades later, Roger Bacon noted that the Mongols had indeed come from the region of the Caspian and Black Seas, where

⁴¹ Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora* ed. H.R. Luard (Rolls Series 57; London 1872-83) II 316f. (Alexander III's letter, dated 13 September 1181), VI 75-84, 163-65 (Documents about the Tartars. The ones from Hungary specify that they are Muslims and have sallied forth from behind the mountains, where they had been locked away. Indeed they might be Gog and Magog). Matthew does not comment on these passing references to Gog and Magog. See also Robert E. Lerner, *The Powers of Prophecy. The Cedar of Lebanon Vision from the Mongol Onslaught to the Dawn of the Enlightenment* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1983) 27-30 and passim. The book discusses a related prophecy.

⁴² See *The Mongol Missions. Narratives and letters ... translated by a Nun of Stanbrook Abbey*, ed. Christopher Dawson (New York 1955); Bezzola, *Die Mongolen* cit. 118-49, 168-82; also Jean de Joinville, *Histoire de Saint Louis* chs. 93-95, 102. Giovanni da Piano Carpino parts company with the other missionaries on this count. He mentions Prester John once, and on that occasion has him defeat the army of Genghis Khan with the help of human dummies made from metal and filled with Greek fire. They are placed on horses and sent forward to cause havoc in the enemy ranks.

⁴³ William of Rubruck describes (ch. 52) how he passed through Alexander's iron gates and mentions many Jews closeby; see *The Mongol Missions*, ed. Dawson cit. The Dominican Simon de Saint-Quentin (or Tournai) identifies the Mongols with Gog and Magog of the apocalyptic prophecies. Gog must be the Great Khan Guyuk (who was Genghis Khan's grandson). However, Simon rejects the identification of the Tartars with the Lost Tribes locked behind Alexander's gates; see Bezzola, *Die Mongolen* cit. 128. Simon's report has been preserved thanks to Vincent de Beauvais, who inserted it in his *Speculum historiale*. Vincent knew the contemporary sources on Mongol activities well, but did not attempt to resolve their contradictions; see Bezzola, *Die Mongolen* cit. 157-59.

Gog and Magog were located behind Alexander's gates; but hence had also come other nations. Referring to Jerome, Roger mentioned the Goths and the Vandals. And hence, said Roger's friend, William of Rubruck, referring to Isidore, came also the Huns, who had posed no less of a threat than the Mongols.⁴⁴

The expectations placed in the Mongols were thus reduced from mythological and eschatological to strictly historico-political proportions. But even the hopes for a political alliance soon faded. Joinville was present at Caesarea in 1251, when Louis IX received the report of his envoy to Guyuk Khan. He quotes the letter that Guyuk's widow sent back to the French king:

This we send you for a warning, for you cannot have peace if you are not at peace with us. Prester John rose against us, and such and such kings (giving the names of many) and all we have put to the sword. We bid you, then, every year to send us of your gold and of your silver so much as may win our friendship. If you do not do this we shall destroy you and your people, as we have done to those we have named.⁴⁵

To this Joinville adds: "The king, you may be sure, repented greatly of having sent his ambassadors." It is true that the Frankish hopes for a Mongol alliance were revived once more — in 1258 the Mongols even took Baghdad — before they were irretrievably dashed. In 1260 a Mameluk army under Baibars defeated the Mongols at Ain Jalud. After that it remained for travel fiction⁴⁶ and epic poetry to prolong the myth of a Prester John located in the Orient. In the so-called *Younger Titurel*, composed (before 1272) by Albrecht von Scharfenberg, Parzival and the grail itself are finally transferred to

⁴⁴ Alexander Minorita, *Expositio in Apocalypsim* 20, ed. Alois Wachtel in MGH Quellen zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters I (Weimar 1955) 433. Roger Bacon, *Moralis philosophia*, ed. E. Massa (Zurich 1953) 16f. William of Rubruck, ch. 21 in *The Mongol Missions*, ed. Dawson cit.. For the Huns, see also Jerome's letter 78.8; Bezzola, *Die Mongolen* cit. 201-9.

⁴⁵ Joinville, *Histoire de Saint Louis* ch. 95; the translation is René Hague's (New York 1955).

⁴⁶ See in particular *Mandeville's Travels* chs. 30-34, ed. M.C. Seymour (Oxford 1967) 195-223. The book was written about 1357. As late as the first quarter of the sixteenth century, the anonymous author of the chapbook narrating the travels of the Portuguese Infante Dom Pedro describes a lengthy interview between his hero and Prester John in the Indian city of "Alves." See Rogers, *The Travels of the Infante Dom Pedro* cit. 146-53.

India and the realm of Prester John.⁴⁷ Beginning with the fourteenth century, however, Prester John was deprived of his mythical nimbus and with growing regularity was located in eastern Africa. 'Prester John' simply became a name for the Christian ruler of Ethiopia.⁴⁸

III

The Barbarossa Myth

At the time of the Mongol invasions the myth of Gog and Magog continued to convey apocalyptic anguish, but the initial identification with the Mongols was soon given up. By contrast, Prester John had never been cast among the agents of the eschatological events, despite his associations with Gog and Magog. He had at first been taken for real, but was soon recognized as a mythical figure and eventually relegated to travel phantasies, except when lending his name to the ruler of Ethiopia. On the other hand, the Tiburtine Sibyl and her line of rulers tantalisingly marked by a mere initial still proved irresistible. Antichrist retained his power over impressible minds, but he was loosening his grip on history. The *mysterium iniquitatis* of 2 Thessalonians no longer meant that Nero, or another ancient persecutor, would appear again in the end of time. As early as the middle of the twelfth century, Peter Lombard (d. 1160) had returned to the authoritative position of the early Fathers. Borrowing Augustine's own words, he opposed those who assumed that Nero "will be resurrected and then become the Antichrist," and likewise those who thought that "he had not been killed, but merely removed so as to be presumed killed, and was now hidden in the vigour of his virile age that he had at the time of his death, until he will be revealed in his own time..."⁴⁹

⁴⁷ *Der Jüngere Titirel*, ed. K.A. Hahn (Quedlinburg 1842) 598-610 (stanzas 6085-6210). *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Helmut de Boor and Richard Newald, III-1 (Munich 1962) 52-64. Zarncke, *Der Priester Johannes* cit. 968-93.

⁴⁸ *The Hebrew Letters*, ed. Ullendorff and Beckingham cit. 5-10.

⁴⁹ Peter Lombard, *Collectanea* on 2 Thessal. 2.7, PL 192.318f. For St. Augustine cf. above n. 6.

If Antichrist was loosening his grip on history, he was not losing it completely, though. In a small way, the endless repetitions of the Sibylline prophecies with regard to a faceless Constans,⁵⁰ ruler of the final days, assisted the birth of one of the most enduring historical myths of the Middle Ages. Constans was sometimes granted the blessing of a historical incarnation in the person of the emperor Frederick. As so often, this gift was originally due to folklore.⁵¹ It is a frequently documented phenomenon that simple folk refuse to believe, at least on one level of consciousness, that their leader or ruler has died. Nero's return in the fullness of time can probably be traced back to such a refusal. Other examples include Charles the Rash of Burgundy, Joseph II of Austria, Napoleon I, several Russian Czars and the German President Friedrich Ebert (d. 1925). Přemysl Otakar II of Bohemia was believed to be alive in some hidden place, although he had been killed in battle (1278) and his body was afterwards exhibited for all to see.

Emperor Frederick II died on 13 December 1250 in Castel Fiorentino in Apulia. His death was kept secret until 26 December. Then his body was transferred with great pomp to Salerno and thence by boat to Palermo, where his stately tomb still is to be seen. Legend-making, nevertheless, began at once. Frederick had disappeared, but he was not dead. He had merely turned "Prester John's ring," which he wore on his finger and which had the power to render the bearer invisible. He was concealing himself inside Mount Etna.⁵² In 1261 a man in

⁵⁰ Typically, a version of the prophecy of the Tiburtine Sibyl, falsely attributed to Bede, ambiguously treats *constans* as as a mere adjective as well as a proper name. "*Et tunc exsurget rex nomine H animo constans. H ille idem Constans erit rex Romanorum et Graecorum...*" (PL 90.1185). The connection between Pseudo-Bede and Geoffrey of Viterbo (d. 1192/1200), who also names the final ruler Constans, is discussed in Haeusler, *Das Ende der Geschichte* cit. 42-51. A very similar version is found in Matthew Paris (d. 1259); see his *Chronica maiora* cit. I 49. A century later the tale of Constans is repeated in the middle-English *Cursor mundi*, ed. R. Morris (London 1874-93), vv. 22315ff., pp. 1276-9.

⁵¹ See, also for the following examples, František Graus, "Die Herrschersagen des Mittelalters als Geschichtsquelle" *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 51 (1969) 65-93; Will-Erich Peuckert, *Die grosse Wende. Das apokalyptische Saeculum und Luther*, second ed. (Darmstadt 1966) I 214.

⁵² *Kaiser Friedrich II. in Briefen und Berichten seiner Zeit*, ed. and transl. Klaus J. Heinisch (Darmstadt 1968) 636-39. King Arthur was also thought to be hiding in a splendid palace inside Mount Etna; see Arturo Graf, "Il tramonto delle leggende" in *La vita italiana nel Trecento. Conferenze tenute a Firenze nel 1891* new ed. (Milan 1904) 293-321, esp. 296, citing Gervase of Tilbury, Caesarius of Heisterbach and *Floriant et Florete*. See also Graus, "Die Herrschersagen ..." cit. 81. In Germany popular refusal to believe Frederick's death is documented as early as 1251, and many times thereafter; see Peuckert, *Die grosse Wende* cit.,

Sicily claimed to be the Emperor Frederick, having returned. Another claimant resided 1284-85 in Neuss on the Rhine and had a considerable following. Others yet — or was it always the same man? — turned up at the same time in Lübeck and the Alsace.⁵³ As late as 1546 a mentally deranged tailor claimed to be Frederick II.⁵⁴ People continued to believe that the Hohenstaufen emperor would return some day; when and where this would happen was often irrelevant. Under the weight of the old myth of the latter-day emperor, Frederick's return was delayed to apocalyptic times. The apocalyptic impulses should, however, not be overrated. There is little evidence that deep religious feelings were aroused. On the other hand, it is highly significant that the realistic time frame was ruptured and a shallow flux of mythical time began to seep in. While sober historians kept their distance, a popular tradition formed. It proved singularly enduring and constantly invited skillful exploitation for a variety of religio-political ends.

Apocalypticism first entered the fray when the Hohenstaufen emperor was still alive. Between 1248 and 1250 a Dominican in Swabia, friar Arnold, composed a tract *De correctione ecclesiae*. In terms reminiscent of Joachite prophecies, it announced the close of a sixth world age and the imminent approach of a seventh. The latter, an age of peace and justice, would set an end to the horrendous heresies of Pope Innocent IV and his party. The renewal of church and society would be brought about by the Dominican order under the direction of none other than Frederick II, who, Arnoldus claimed, had heartily welcomed his ideas.⁵⁵ In so far as this was a political programme, it may have been devised to counteract an opposing Joachite tradition, which associated Frederick II with the evil powers of the doomsday events. The chronicle of friar Salimbene of Parma (1221-after 1287) contains many echoes of the hatred against the

I 214, II 680.

⁵³ František Graus, *Lebendige Vergangenheit. Überlieferung im Mittelalter und in den Vorstellungen vom Mittelalter* (Cologne 1975) 340. Kurt Pfister, *Kaiser Friedrich II.* (Munich 1942) 386-90.

⁵⁴ Franz Kampers, *Die deutsche Kaiseridee in Prophetie und Sage* (Munich 1896) 160. Heinz Durchhardt, *Protestantisches Kaisertum und altes Reich* (Wiesbaden 1977) 88.

⁵⁵ Arnoldus O.P., *De correctione ecclesiae epistola*, ed. E. Winkelmann (Berlin 1865); cf. Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy* cit. 310f. As Reeves sees it: "Here for the first time we meet what is really Joachim's third *status* recast in political terms... So the two streams — of Joachimism and of the ancient World Emperor tradition — finally met in this political programme to bring in the seventh age of renewal."

Hohenstaufen that was rampant among the Franciscan Observants. Several apocalyptic prophecies of Joachite coinage were applied to him, although after Frederick's death, Salimbene was himself ready to dismiss them.⁵⁶ After that the myth of the apocalyptic emperor became increasingly exposed to politicization — a process that has been intensely studied ever since ultra-nationalist German scholars of the Bismarck era began to take a partisan interest in it. Particular satisfaction was derived from pitting the German latter-day emperor against the rival tradition of a Charlemagne redivivus, propagated chiefly, though not uniquely, by French chroniclers.⁵⁷

After Frederick II's death two developments occurred. On the one hand, the chiliastic expectations he had aroused were transferred to another, a future, Frederick.⁵⁸ On the other hand, the late Frederick's concealed survival was stretched to apocalyptic times, when he would return as the millenarian prince of peace.⁵⁹ Around

⁵⁶ Salimbene of Parma, MGH SS 32.201, 236-43, 302-3; cf Marjorie Reeves, "Joachimist Influences on the Idea of a Last World Emperor" *Traditio* 17 (1961) 323-70, esp. 325f.

⁵⁷ For an early French-patriotic version of the Sibylline prophecy, complete with Gog and Magog bursting in from the north and the emperor C[harlemagne] as the last emperor on the Mount of Olives, see Adso Hermericus (d. 992 as abbot of Montier-en-Der), *Libellus de Antichristo ad Gebergam reginam*, PL. 101.1289-98; Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte* cit. 104-13. In general, see Gerhard von Zezschwitz, *Das Kaisertum des Mittelalters in seinen religiösen Motiven* (Leipzig 1877), [I] 25ff. and passim; Kampers, *Die deutsche Kaiseridee* cit. 91-94, 110-28 and passim; Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy* cit. 321-31, 360-74 and passim, and also her "Joachimist influences ..." cit.

⁵⁸ A good example is the Erfurt Minorite chronicle. A version of 1272 offers the text of a prophecy that remains partly grounded in history. The new "Fridericus," following Manfred (d. 1266) and Conradin (d. 1268), may well be another of Frederick II's grandsons, Frederick 'der Freidige,' Landgrave of Thuringia (1257-1323):

Regnabit Menfridus bastardus a flatu mezani usque ad finem regni. Contra quem veniet rex ultramontanus, leo Francie... Tunc surget filius aquile, et in volatu suo debilitabitur leo, et XXI die post conflictum filius aquile incidet in os leonis, et post hec leo modico tempore regnabit. Orietur enim ramus de radice regni Fridericus nomine orientalis, qui debellabit leonem et ad nichilum rediget, ita ut memoria sua non sit amplius super terram. Cuius potencie brachia extendentur usque ad finem mundi. Ipse enim imperans imperabit, et sub eo summus pontifex capietur. Post hec Theutonici et Hyspani confederabuntur et regnum Francie redigent in nichilum (MGH SS 24.207).

The mixture of political prediction and apocalyptic prophecy in this passage is typical. It was quoted verbatim in the *Chronographia* of the Dominican Konrad of Halberstadt (d. after 1353); see Haeusler, *Das Ende der Geschichte* cit. 125f.; Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy* cit. 311f.

⁵⁹ Towards the end of the fourteenth century, the Constance universal chronicle offers a verse adaptation of the oracle of the Tiburtine Sibyl, in which the latter-day emperor's name is given as Frederick rather than Constans. This poem may be composed around 1350. At the same time the Franciscan chronicler John of Winterthur reports a widespread expectation that "Frederick, the second of that name" would be resurrected from the dead and return in the fullness of power. He will set right all social evils. For the poor women he will find rich husbands; he will also

1440 we first find Frederick moving to the hiding place that was to remain his abode through the ages. Johann Rothe, in his *Thuringsche Chronik*, mentioned the clandestine web of a new heresy. It was claimed, he said, that Frederick was alive and would live until doomsday; moreover, that he wandered around in the ruins of a castle atop the Kyffhäuser mountain in Thuringia, as well as in other ruined castles. None of his successors was a true emperor.⁶⁰ Frederick soon won out over Charlemagne as the emperor redivivus of the German people,⁶¹ and the Kyffhäuser soon superseded other locations as his abode. Its castle had been erected, it was said, by Caesar. Indeed, what could suit the last true emperor better than a stronghold built by the very first? Moreover, the castle was crowned by a mighty donjon built by Frederick I 'Barbarossa,' and Barbarossa it was who in the sixteenth century came to replace his namesake, Frederick II, as the latter-day emperor of the Kyffhäuser. As was formerly the case with the Etna, Barbarossa now had his resting place right inside the mountain. His red beard had grown through the stone table before him, as he sat there, asleep through the centuries, waiting for the time of his second parousia. His mountain abode was by preference, but not always, the Kyffhäuser. Appropriately enough the Swabian emperor was also seen in the Black Forest. It probably is no mere coincidence that in 1525 the Kyffhäuser served as a rallying point for rebelling peasants. The Black Forest too was traditionally a hotbed for revolutionaries.

From the region of the Upper Rhine came the two most noted programmes of political reform in Renaissance Germany. The *Reformatio Sigismundi* was written between 1434 and 1439 in a circle

induce the nuns and monks to marry. As for the other clerics, he will persecute them so vigorously that they will put anything on their heads, even cow dung, to hide their tonsures. In the end he will lay down his crown on the Mount of Olives. All of this, John decides, is sheer lunacy. See MGH SS new series III, ed. F. Baethgen (Berlin 1924) 280-82; also Haeusler, *Das Ende der Geschichte* cit. 100, 134; Peuckert, *Die grosse Wende* cit. I 216-18; Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy* cit. 312 and passim.

⁶⁰ "Von dissem keisser Frederiche dem ketzer erhüb sich eine nuwe ketzerei, die noch heimelichen under den cristen ist, unde die glouben des genzlichen, das keisser Frederich noch lebe unde lebinde bleiben sulle bis an den jungisten tagk, unde das kein rechtir keisser noch om worden sei adir werden sulle, unde das her wander zu Kuffhussen yn Doringen uf dem wusten slosse unde ouch uf andern wusten burgen, die zu dem Reiche gehören, unde rede mit den lewten unde lasse sich zu gezeiten sehin;" quoted in Peuckert, *Die grosse Wende* cit. I 215 and Graus, *Lebendige Vergangenheit* cit. 341. See also Frank L. Borchardt, *German Antiquity in Renaissance Myth* (Baltimore 1971) 49-52.

⁶¹ See above n. 57.

of men associated with the Council of Basel. The *Buch der Hundert Kapitel*, whose anonymous author is known as the Revolutionary of the Upper Rhine, was composed between c. 1498 and c. 1510. Despite substantial differences in outlook, the two writings resemble each other in their severe critique of the church and of secular princes. Both reflect an intensity of popular expectations reminiscent of the Joachite prophecies, and both announce a purified order of state and society — an order of justice and peace, brought about by a new Emperor Frederick. Indeed, both attach great significance to the literal meaning of the name *Friede-rich*.⁶² The new Frederick is not — and this is what matters here — a reincarnation of an older, historical ruler. He is a righter of present wrongs rather than a harbinger of apocalyptic times. In both texts he is, like Prester John of old, a priest as well as a king. Above all, he is the leader and friend of the poor and suppressed. The author of the *Reformatio Sigismundi* identifies him with an obscure cleric, one Friedrich of Latnau, who attended in the Council of Basel and there composed in Latin a manifesto of social change, which forms the nucleus of the *Reformatio*. None other than Sigismund, the ruling emperor of the day, is made to announce his own substitution by Friedrich of Latnau. The advent of the new emperor has been pointed out to him in a dream, the truth of which was authenticated by the presence of the morning star in the sky.⁶³ Similarly, in the *Buch der Hundert Kapitel* the new Frederick is a petty knight of undistinguished social origins, but endowed with the experience that comes with age: “*ein alter, kleiner Mann.*”

Both writings breathe the spirit of the Renaissance in that the flow of history comes to rest in a reforming utopia rather than a doomsday vision. The old myth of the emperor *redivivus* lost momentum for a while, but it was far from dead. The tale of Frederick asleep in the mountain, awaiting the fullness of time to commence his Thousand Years' rule of justice, gained definitive form with a prose version published in 1703. In time it provided the inspiration for a famous

⁶² *Reformation Kaiser Sigmunds*, ed. H. Koller (Stuttgart 1964). *Das Buch der hundert Kapitel und der vierzig Statuten des sogenannten Oberrheinischen Revolutionärs*, chs. 62f., ed. A. Franke and G. Zschäbitz (Berlin 1967) 368-78. Vgl. Peuckert, *Die grosse Wende* cit. I 219-45. The same sources serve for what follows. For a suggestion that the *Reformatio Sigismundi* reflects the popular impact of Joan of Arc, see Heinz Thomas, “Jeanne la Pucelle, das Basler Konzil und die ‘Kleinen’ der Reformatio Sigismundi” *Francia* 11 (1983) 319-39.

⁶³ From Antiquity it was a common belief that dreams dreamt towards the morning told the truth; see e.g. Dante, *Inferno* 26.7.

ballad by Friedrich Rückert, composed in 1817.⁶⁴ Rückert's poem may be seen as the epitome of a general resurgence of the old myth in the nineteenth century. The revival was ushered in by the brothers Grimm and Joseph von Görres, among others. Soon Barbarossa in his Kyffhäuser was kept alive by a hundred busy pens. At first he was a precious token of the national awakening and the victory over Napoleon I. Next he showed his vigour in the heady days of the 1848 Revolution, before striding on to a new zenith of popularity after the proclamation of the German *Reich* in 1871. Another climax was reached a quarter of a century later, coinciding with the erection of a huge monument on the Kyffhäuser (1890-97), which was actually a memorial for the new *Kaiser* William I. The deliberate obfuscation of the contrast between myth and reality, *fabula* and *historia*, was greatly helped by the peculiar norms of historical representation in figurative art that we shall examine in Chapter IX. The painters and sculptors of that period frequently conflated Barbarossa with William I 'Barbablanca.' The former was even given the physiognomy of the latter.⁶⁵

It is instructive to compare two model representatives of solid German scholarship, the Lutheran theologian Gerhard von Zezschwitz, writing in 1877, and the librarian Franz Kampers, writing in 1895-96. Both emphasized the profound significance of the old myth in their own day. From a twelfth-century manuscript Zezschwitz edited a Latin play that was later touted by Kampers as "the first German poetical glorification of the *Kaiseridee*, which is entirely permeated by the national character of the latter."⁶⁶ In his analysis of the play Zezschwitz impressed upon his readers how even in the Middle Ages the rule of German emperors had been seen to present the world with much-needed safeguards against the threats of wily Roman popes,

⁶⁴ See Kampers, *Die deutsche Kaiseridee* cit., 161f.
Der alte Barbarossa,
Der Kaiser Friederich,
Im unterirdischen Schlosse
Hält er verborgen sich. ...

Er hat hinabgenommen
Des Reiches Herrlichkeit
Und wird einst wiederkommen
Mit ihr, zu seiner Zeit.

⁶⁵ See below p. 395.

⁶⁶ Kampers, *Die deutsche Kaiseridee* cit. 61, cf. 154.

acting in unison with French monarchs. Typically for the progressive churchman that he was, Zezschwitz had no use for either an apocalypse or Antichrist. The old myth was politically relevant, to be sure,⁶⁷ but beyond that it was a phantom, a “dream.” He termed it absurd to think that the renewed *Reich* would last to the end of time or that at any time it would aspire to universal rule. On the latter count he was probably mistaken.

Two decades later Kampers was far from sharing Zezschwitz’s view that the old myth was a “dream” that called for “disillusioned” analysis. In his preface Kampers exclaimed:

In these days of glorious triumph for the national idea, [my book] may point out to the educated part of the nation what a precious heirloom the German people possesses in its finest national legend, preserved all along with touching fidelity, and what glorious treasure it holds in the poetically transfigured *Kaiseridee* — a treasure it must protect at all times.

It was, however, for the last sentence of his book that Kampers reserved the pinnacle of his pathos:

The *Kaiser* has risen, but the legend is not lost sight of. Smiling, it offers the carefully guarded sceptre to the reawakened ruler and puts on his head the wreath of a sacred tradition.⁶⁸

In contrast to Kampers’ “smiling” legend, other assessments were distinctly unsmiling. Characteristically it was claimed in the 1890s that people no longer saw the millennium of peace, but war and victory, as the momentous message of the old myth:

⁶⁷ Zezschwitz, *Das Kaisertum des Mittelalters* cit., [I] 4f., 23f., 29f. In relating Frederick II to the new *Kaiser* William I, Zezschwitz insisted that the Hohenstaufen had never elicited passionate support in Germany until, in old age, he undertook his crusade to Jerusalem. In William, the Germans now had again “*einen greisen Heldenkaiser, der sich nicht schämt, seine Knie zu beugen vor dem Kreuze Christi und seine Krone in den Staub zu legen vor dem Könige aller Könige.*”

⁶⁸ Kampers, *Die deutsche Kaiseridee* cit. 171.

Since the second half of the seventeenth century nothing else was expected of the returning emperor than a bloody, but victorious, struggle for a great and united — for a German fatherland.⁶⁹

We have pursued the myth of the latter-day emperor to the pathetic end of its long history, well beyond the Middle Ages. From an early point that history shows the dire consequences that result when *fabula* is kidnapped, rather than just courted, by political ambition. Although I have attempted to spare the reader the unending litany of monotonous repetitions to which the old Sibylline prophecy of the last emperor was subjected, these consequences are, I hope, now clearly visible. We are faced with a sterility that could not be overcome even by the medieval gift of fertile imagination. If we compare this to the much shorter run of the tales of Gog and Prester John, the contrast speaks for itself. In these latter cases, political application had retained a sound balance with healthy curiosity and freewheeling inventiveness. *Fabula* had run its course and then had sunk, confronted by the question that always proves inconvenient to political propagandists and is carefully circumvented by them — the simple question, is it true?

⁶⁹ Richard Schröder, *Die deutsche Kaisersage und die Wiedergeburt des deutschen Reiches* (Heidelberg 1893) 50. The two lectures published in this volume were given by the author in 1873 and 1891, respectively; here the latter is quoted.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE RENAISSANCE PERIOD (1300-1600)

I

Terminological Refinements

The Middle Ages had left behind a particularly rich tradition of *fabula*. Critical checks to the invention and transmission of imaginary facets of the past, while not entirely missing, had so far been of no great consequence. In the fourteenth century, however, some central aspects of that tradition, together with many other medieval concepts and institutions, began to be questioned and sometimes rejected. Even the terminology of *fabula* and *historia* that had been commonplace in the Middle Ages was found to be lacking. Early in the Middle Ages Isidore of Seville (c.560-636) had defined three categories of historical reality: *historiae* ("true things, which actually happened"), *argumenta* ("things that might have happened, even though they actually did not") and *fabulae* ("things, which neither happened nor could have").¹ Isidore's definitions set an enduring standard; but eventually the inquiry was resumed. After tenacious grappling with the problem, Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-75) was able to cast new light on the relationship between *historia* and *fabula*. Towards the end of *De genealogia deorum gentilium*, the great work of scholarship that occupied him intermittently through the last three decades of his life, he distinguished four classes of *fabula*, of which only one, "the babble of old women",² fits Isidore's simple definitions. The other three have in common that all conceal some factual truth underneath the surface of a fictional tale. One of them, which is explained with the example of Aesop's animal fables, bears no relationship to history, but the remaining two classes do. The first relates to the metamorphoses of humans into plants, stars and such like, and here Boccaccio was

¹ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* 1.44.5; cf. above pp. 59-61.

² Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogiae deorum gentilium* 14.9, ed. Vincenzo Romano (Bari 1951) II 706f.

able to recognize a record of individuals in archaic times. The other, Boccaccio says, is actually “closer to *historia* than to *fabula*.” He refers to Virgil and Homer, who combined the recording of what Boccaccio believed to be historical facts with tales such as Ulysses’ exposure to the song of the Sirens — tales inserted because they can serve what might be termed today the analysis of character. To underline his high regard for the veracity of this last category Boccaccio included in it Christ’s parables as recorded in the gospels.

Boccaccio’s system resulted from a careful and persistent search for the elusive frontier between fact and fiction that is visible throughout his *Genealogiae*.³ His readers were bound to discover that the complex relationship between *fabula* and *historia* could not be reduced to the simple antinomy that Isidore had suggested. A whole range of possible connections needed to be tested, and sometimes, as in the gospels, invented tales and the historical accounts would form a perfect synthesis. When he suggested that the gospels contained facets of *fabula* in the form of Christ’s parables, Boccaccio, of course, was emphasizing that *fabula* sometimes could be wholly truthful, and not that the gospels sometimes fell short of the truth. The *Genealogiae* never led to a questioning of its author’s orthodoxy. A century and a half later Erasmus of Rotterdam (c. 1467-1536) was not so lucky.

In his paraphrase of Mark 11.7 Erasmus used the term *fabula* with reference to Christ’s entering Jerusalem, mounted on a colt.⁴ *Fabula* here had clearly the neutral sense of ‘scene or action, as if performed on the stage.’ This was not, however, how Noël Bédà, Erasmus’ arch-critic at the Sorbonne, saw it. Baring either his ignorance or his malice, he took Erasmus to task. Bédà conceded that *fabula* could be an innocuous term, but clumsily quoting Augustine, he argued that in this case it was not. “I say that Erasmus in his paraphrase on the Holy Gospel blasphemously calls Christ’s mysteries a *fabula*. In other words, Christ himself could be said to tell fibs (*fabulosus dici poterit*).” Erasmus replied with perfect justification that Bédà wrongly imputed the meaning ‘telling fibs.’ *Fabula* was an appropriate translation for the Greek term *drāma*, and others, less ignorant than Bédà would understand that this was what was meant here.⁵ Bédà was

³ See below pp. 151-53.

⁴ Erasmus, LB VII 243B.

⁵ Noël Bédà, *Annotationes* ..., in *Iacobum Fabrum Stapulensem libri duo et in Desiderium Erasmus Roterodamum liber unus* (Paris 1526) 212f. (*Propositio* and *Censura* 132). Erasmus, LB IX 504A-B, 653F-654C.

indeed unperceptive. It is true that Erasmus often used *fabula* in the other sense of 'fictitious account' or of Boccaccio's 'babble of old women,' and that when he meant 'play' the implication might still be pejorative. Béda himself censored such a statement. Erasmus had written: "The monks know how to accompany their taking of vows with a travesty of holy rites, and so well do they lay on this *fabula* that sometimes the audience starts crying."⁶ If Béda had claimed that Christ's *fabula* was meant as derisively as that of the monks, he would have had a relevant, if still implausible, argument. While Erasmus continued to use *fabula* primarily in the sense of *mythos* in contrast and comparison to *historia*,⁷ the idea of stage performance added an intriguing dimension to the meaning of the term. *Fabula*, even if used ironically, was a morality play; in Christ's case it reminded Erasmus of the "ludi solemnes" performed in churches. *Fabula*, as a play, was not so different from history. For Erasmus history too consisted of scenes enacted on God's universal stage, and only the discovery of moral lessons could justify historical inquiry. Both terms shared a fluid quality of truthfulness; both might involve flattering and lying, and both might reveal an abyss of profound meaning.⁸

The French humanist Guillaume Budé (1468-1540) contributed another element to the puzzle of Renaissance terminology. In his *Commentarii linguae graecae* (1529) he rediscovered the Greek terms of *logopoios* and *logographos* and discussed them at length for the benefit of his contemporaries. He knew that in Antiquity they had referred to the sphere of the professional orator and therefore might be translated with either *historicus* or *fabulator*, as might suit the context. Both translations pointed to a skill expected of the orator.⁹ In a general way, then, the notion of *fabula* became more complex; at the same time, however, the notion of *historia* tended to be more restricted, at least in the usage of Renaissance humanists, who fashioned their Latin after classical models. *Historia*, in the sense of

⁶ Béda, *Annotationes* cit. 186f. (*Propositio* and *Censura* 15). Erasmus, LB IX 563C: "Norunt monachi suas professiones ceremoniis imitatis commendare populo, et sic agunt hanc fabulam, ut nonnunquam erumpant lachrymae spectatoribus."

⁷ A typical example occurs at the beginning of *De immensa Dei misericordia* (LB V 558D-559B), where the argument is about mythical and historical characters claiming divine status.

⁸ P.G. Bietenholz, *History and Biography in the Works of Erasmus of Rotterdam* (Geneva 1966) 13f., 24-28, with references to Erasmus' writings. I will no longer maintain that Erasmus used *historia* in the sense of stage performance.

⁹ Guillaume Budé, *Opera omnia* (Basel 1557, repr. 1966) IV 245f., cf. 928, 1176. For the *logographoi* cf. above pp. 29-31.

historia sacra, the Bible text, and *sensus historicus* as a reference to the literal as opposed to an allegorical meaning, had been commonplace expressions in the Middle Ages. Although Erasmus could employ them so occasionally, this usage was no longer frequent. *Historia*, in the sense of a stage performance and in the sense of pictorial composition or sequence of pictures, had also been common in medieval Latin and from there had passed into the vernacular languages. But, as far as I can see, it no longer occurs in Latin works of scholarship. To the Renaissance scholars *historia* normally meant what it still means today.¹⁰

It is a general characteristic of the Renaissance that the expectation of rational judgement grew common. With regard to the mass of legends and tales replete with miracles which the Middle Ages had accumulated, neither the authors nor the reading public could easily escape from that expectation. At the same time, however, it was keenly experienced that the reach of reason was limited. Beyond it still lay the vastness of religious faith. Also the Platonic realm of ideas came to be rediscovered — ideas, which held out the promise of a perfection that exceeded reality and feasibility, and yet had to be striven for, if human striving made any sense. Moreover, Herodotus and Thucydides had a regular berth in humanistic reading culture ever since Lorenzo Valla (1407-57), towards the end of his life, had produced Latin versions of part of the former and all of the latter. Valla, along with the early Florentine humanists, also had a part in the rediscovery of ancient rhetoric. The relationship between *res*, facts, and *verba*, verbal expression, never ceased to intrigue the Renaissance men of letters. The new sense of complexity, which we first encountered in Boccaccio, became ever more relevant. We shall see how stubbornly Boccaccio would enquire whether the deeds reported of the past represented reality or imagination. After him, that question would simply not go away, but nor would that other question, which had troubled many thinkers from Plato to William of Ockham: how real was reality?

¹⁰ Karl Keuck, *Historia. Geschichte des Wortes ... in der Antike und in den romanischen Sprachen* (Emsdetten 1934). Joachim Knappe, 'Historie' in *Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit. Begriffs- und gattungsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen im interdisziplinären Kontext* (Baden-Baden 1984).

II

Towards an Identification of Historical Myth

On his imaginary journey through Hell, Purgatory and Heaven Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) meets many figures of the past, some of whom are now considered mythical or legendary while others are to us, as they were to Dante, historical. On his visit to Limbo Dante sees Julius Caesar walking in the company of Hector, the legendary hero of Troy, and Aeneas, who links Troy with the mythical origins of Rome. Mythical Homer is respectfully attended by Horace and Ovid, whose lives are among the best documented in the history of Roman literature. Virgil, who is Dante's guide, also recalls those of his fellow dwellers in Limbo who, shortly after his own arrival there, were led away by Christ. He mentions David, who is clearly historical, in the same breath with Abraham, Jacob, Isaac and Rachel, whose historicity is doubtful, to say the least.¹¹

It is clear that Dante did not distinguish between historical and fictional characters the way we do. He followed the Euhemeristic practice of the Christian Fathers, but in doing so, he was led by the exigencies of his sophisticated plot to discriminate with due precision. In fact, he separated *historia* and *fabula* in a clear and logical fashion. To him an Abraham, a Ulysses and an Ovid were all part of his historical heritage. Their actions were recorded by authorities whom he considered to be reliable. Moreover, in contrast to the superhuman sphere of God and subhuman sphere of the beast, they were human. Being human, they had died and gone to their due rewards and penalties according to God's inexorable judgement. Dante knew of, and described, other figures that did not conform to these criteria, such as centaurs, furies, demons and devils; these were persistently denied the characteristics of men formerly alive and now dead, this is to say, historical. None the less, they were real in contrast to the Olympian gods who were purely fictional. In the everlasting prison of Hell they were guards, not inmates. Take Cacus. Dante follows Livy's account of Cacus' evil deeds, but also accepts quite literally Virgil's assertion that he was "half human." Thus Dante concludes that Cacus was a centaur and presents him, like the other centaurs, as an

¹¹ Dante, *La Divina Commedia*, *Inferno* 4.58-60, 86-90, 122f.

instrument rather than an object of divine retribution.¹² On the other hand, take Romulus. Here Dante follows Livy, who expressed frank scepticism on account of the divine descent and eventual apotheosis of Rome's founder. For Dante Romulus "*vien ... /da sì vil padre che si rende a Marte*;"¹³ thus he is human and historical. Confronted with the myth of Orpheus, Dante also surmises the presence of a historical character — Orpheus too is in Limbo — under the cloak of fabulous actions.¹⁴ In the case of Dido Dante has no reason to doubt her real existence any more than that of Cleopatra. Therefore Virgil, the admired Virgil, was telling a tale when he described how she had fondled the little god Cupid on her lap. "*Le genti antiche nell' antico errore /...dicean ch'ei sedette in grembo a Dido*."¹⁵

Dante's ancient heroes are the ones present in the universal chronicles of the Middle Ages, but he deprived them of any features that would exceed human potential. Boccaccio went several steps further in rationalizing the legacy of Christian Euhemerism. The later sections of his *Genealogiae deorum gentilium* deal with the heroic age rather than the genesis of the universe and the Olympian gods. In these sections he patiently explored the vast jungle of Greek myths with a view of reclaiming facets of ancient history, which had seldom or never been noticed. The task he had set himself was to produce an orderly survey of the ancient *fabulae*, but as he set to work he developed a real passion for the recovery of *historia*. He did not define *historia*, but the meaning he assigned to the term can be understood from a case such as the tragic experience of Cephalus.¹⁶ After his hunting trips, Cephalus likes to rest in the shade of some thicket and to address a song to the cooling breeze (*aura*) in order to attract it. A passing peasant hears the song and, forming conclusions all of his own, tells Cephalus' wife, Procris, that her husband is courting a nymph named Aura. Procris — Boccaccio prefers to call her Pocris — wants to be sure and hides behind the bushes. When she hears the song, she wants to see and inadvertently moves some twigs. Cephalus notices the movement and, assuming that it was caused by some quarry, hurls his lance. Before she draws her last breath, Procris just

¹² Dante, *Inferno* 25.17-33; cf. 12.55-75. Virgil, *Aeneis* 8.194.

¹³ Dante, *Paradiso* 8.132f. Livy, 1.4.2.

¹⁴ Dante, *Inferno* 4.140 and *Convivio* 2.1.3.

¹⁵ Dante, *Paradiso* 8.6-9; cf. *Inferno* 5.58-63. Virgil, *Aeneis* 1.685.

¹⁶ Boccaccio, *Genealogiae deorum gentilium* 13.65, ed. Romano cit. II 671f.; cf. 12.72, ed. Romano cit. II 626.

manages to beg her husband not to marry Aura in her place. Boccaccio finishes his account as follows. “Now Anselmus¹⁷ seems to have thought that Aura was a woman and thus he writes that she bore to Cephalus his son Hesperus. Theodontius¹⁸ was of the same opinion, and thus the tale is made out to be historical rather than fictional (*sic erit hystoria et non fictio quod narratur*).” Aura’s bearing a son would mean that all characters were human and the story happened, or might have happened, as told. This, then, to Boccaccio would constitute *hystoria*. But of course the story was fictional; Boccaccio rejects Anselmus’ Euhemerist interpretation. Hesperus is of mixed human and extra-human parentage, and that to Boccaccio, as to Dante, always indicates the presence of a myth. Hesperus did not exist; “nothing but his name is to be found.”¹⁹

So Boccaccio wanders through the landscape of classical mythology, gathering a myriad of tales. Even as he prepares to retell them, he weeds out the *fabulae* from the vast field of *hystoria*. To the modern reader, however, his vigorous exercise of Euhemerist cleansing will pose a puzzling problem. After removing those things that could not possibly have happened, he designates the entire residue of things that might conceivably have happened as *hystoria*. Which of those he actually thought did happen is not easy to say. Did he distinguish factuality from mere plausibility in cases like the following? After listing thirty-one labours performed by Hercules — or several of the forty-three different Hercules counted by Varro — Boccaccio examines, one by one, the feasibility of these deeds. Of the killing of two lions, the Nemesian and the Theumesian, and the capture of the Menalian boar he simply remarks: “these are assumed to be historical accounts (*hystoriographa creduntur*), and thus no more needs to be said.” On the other hand, that Hercules destroyed Troy is, without qualification, a “*notissima hystoria*.”²⁰ Fortunately, however, there are also cases where Boccaccio is practising history in the restricted sense now assigned to that term. He is, for example, telling the tale of Phlegias,²¹ the eighth son of the god Mars and the father

¹⁷ The work Boccaccio attributes to Anselmus is the *Imago mundi* by Honorius of Autun. The passage has not been identified.

¹⁸ An otherwise unknown author of the High Middle Ages, whose work Boccaccio had copied in his youth; it is now missing. See Jean Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods*, transl. B.F. Sessions (New York 1961) 221f.

¹⁹ Boccaccio *Genealogiae deorum gentilium* 13.66, ed. Romano cit. II 672.

²⁰ Boccaccio, *Genealogiae deorum gentilium* 13.1, ed. Romano cit. II 632-43.

²¹ Boccaccio, *Genealogiae deorum gentilium* 9.25, ed. Romano cit. II 467f.

of the nymph Coronis. When Coronis is violated by Apollo, her father avenges the deed by setting fire to Apollo's temple in Delphi. For this crime he is punished in Hades, sitting under a giant rock that perpetually threatens to crush him. At this point Boccaccio turns historian. He accepts Eusebius' testimony that the temple of Delphi was burnt down in the year 3752 from the creation of the world, which was the twenty-third year in the reign of Danaus, king of Argos.²² The perpetrator of this crime, whoever he may have been, was called "Phlegias from *phlegon*, flame" and sensibly said to be a son of Mars, for Mars (in his planetary function) "is hot and dry and in charge of conflagrations and fires." In real life this "Phlegias" must have been a tyrant, as Macrobius points out,²³ for tyrants must live in constant fear of the wrath of the people.

Dante had been content to apply his distinction between *fabula* and *historia* to traditional characters. Boccaccio patiently laboured to retrieve grains of ancient history from the ore of Greek mythology. And there he stopped, making no effort to demythicize the accounts of the earliest ages, as they were given in the medieval chronicles, or even to develop his own survey of primeval civilization with the help of mythology. Had he attempted the latter, he would have stolen the thunder from the scholars of the seventeenth century. None the less, Boccaccio's achievement was considerable. He had demonstrated that Ovid's *Metamorphoses* could be put to good, rational use despite the outcries of those like Roger Bacon (c.1213-c.1291), who saw in them nothing but a peril to faith and morality, and in defiance of all those like Giovanni de' Bonsignori (documented 1346-91), who gave this peril as his reason for allegorizing Ovid almost beyond recognition.²⁴ In the two centuries following Boccaccio a whole series of mythological dictionaries paid witness to the newly won respectability of the ancient gods and heroes,²⁵ but much of the traditional Euhemerism remained intact. The ancient heroes at any rate, and even some of the gods, were assumed to be historical, although the record of their human activities lay mostly hidden under a thick crust of

²² Eusebius of Caesarea, *Chronicorum libri duo*, ed. Alfred Schoene (Berlin 1875) II 33 (divergent from Boccaccio's source).

²³ Macrobius, *Commentarius in Somnium Scipionis* 1.10.15.

²⁴ Bodo Guthmüller, *Ovidio metamorphoseos vulgare. Formen und Funktion der volkssprachlichen Wiedergabe klassischer Dichtung in der italienischen Renaissance* (Boppard 1981) 78-80.

²⁵ D.T. Starnes and E.W. Talbert, *Classical Myth and Legend in Renaissance Dictionaries* (Chapel Hill 1955).

mythical and legendary lore. As far as I can see, throughout the Renaissance period, Erasmus of Rotterdam was alone in drawing a neat distinction between historical figures and the heroes of the epic tradition, who were fictional.

In the history of our topic Erasmus ought to have marked the bold beginning of an entirely new era. He ought to be introduced here as another Columbus, as the genius who discovered that Ulysses and Caesar belonged to unequivocally different spheres of reality. The truth is that this kind of fanfare would be misleading. Erasmus himself showed no interest in the breakthrough he had achieved and failed to emphasize his novel insight. As a result, it was apparently never noticed. To demonstrate the point, let us turn to his *De duplici copia verborum ac rerum*, an extensive manual of Latin style, repeatedly revised and published in its final form in 1534. In the section devoted to exemplification we find a lengthy chapter "*De exemplo fabuloso*."²⁶ This heading might have been set by an editor rather than the author, but it clearly expresses Erasmus' view of the material gathered on the following pages, where terms like *fabula* and *figmentum* recur with regularity.

Erasmus begins with examples "that have clearly no basis in fact" and recommends that the would-be author preface them with a statement of purpose, such as: "the sages of the earliest times did not without reason invent the following, nor did it happen by accident that by common consent it was kept in general use through so many centuries. Presently we shall explain the meaning." Next, there follow examples relating to the giants, to Tantalus, Achilles, Hercules, Proteus, Pallas Athene, Phaeton and Icarus, Salmoneus, Marsyas, Danae, Midas, Bacchus and, above all Ulysses. These all present allegories, Erasmus says, that must be interpreted according to one of the four traditional senses. There can be no doubt that in defiance of traditional Euhemerism this entire list is mythological according to the modern understanding. Most of the examples here given recur elsewhere in Erasmus' writings and always they are characterized as fictional, derived from the works of epic bards like Homer. Often, moreover, they are presented in explicit contrast with historical figures.²⁷

²⁶ Erasmus, ASD I-6 234-40.

²⁷ Erasmus, ASD I-6 210, I-2 350, LB V 29C-E, 558D-559B.

Erasmus continues his argument with a brief discussion of other categories of “*exempla fabulosa*.” First there are other mythical episodes invented by the bards specifically in imitation of human behaviour, such as Homer’s tale of adulterous Mars caught in the net of cuckolded Vulcan. These, Erasmus says, are more readily understood than the preceding allegories. Then he moves on to the next category:

Even more readily understood are some traditional poets’ topics that sound like *historia* rather than *fabulae* [which is what they actually are]. Such is Orestes, who murdered his own mother; such is Pylades, the proverbial friend. ... Such is finally Arion, who was carried back to his homeland by a dolphin — which St. Augustine takes to be historical (*divus Augustinus historiam autumat*). Of course, Virgil, and even more so Lucan [both epical writers], offer much material that is historical. Herodotus, on the other hand, has much untrustworthy stuff, and Xenophon [a prose historiographer like Herodotus] wrote his *Cyropaedia* more as a school of conduct for life’s vicissitudes than as a historical account. If these things are taken for true, it serves the purpose, if taken for fiction, it does so likewise, because they are invented by wise and excellent writers, whose authority has the force of a precept.²⁸

The last category Erasmus designates is poetry including plays in verse, but excluding epics, and there again he finds a mixture of fiction and historical fact.

The position here taken is, indeed, a bold one. Homer is, once and for all, the *pater omnium fabularum*.²⁹ Erasmus seems to have been quite definite that readers of his epics should not expect to find historical facts in them — and that at a time when all Europe prided itself of a genealogical descent from the heroes of Troy.³⁰ I have failed to find in Erasmus’ writings a single reference to Ulysses or Achilles that would unequivocally suggest historicity. If this is correct, Erasmus has gone well beyond even Thucydides in eliminating myth from Greek history. It must be emphasized, however, that the notions of *fabula* and *historia*, while clearly relevant to him, did not constitute the categories by which he was wont to classify classical literature. Rather these categories were epic, poetry, comedy, rhetoric,

²⁸ Erasmus, ASD I-6 238.

²⁹ Erasmus, ASD I-3 151; cf. I-2 122, IV-3 112.

³⁰ See below pp. 189-95.

historiography, and so on. It was within this general order that he seems to have persistently equated epic with fiction and historiography with a commitment, variously honoured, to telling the facts.³¹

Nevertheless, Erasmus' forward leap on the long, slow road of historical demythologization is impressive. To do him justice, let us look at one more example. Homer and Ovid had described how Circe's magic changed Ulysses' companions into pigs, and the tale had become commonplace. St. Augustine did not say that he believed it, only that the demons were certainly capable of making people think that they had seen a person transformed into an animal.³² Vincent of Beauvais (c.1190 — c.1264) was not so delicate. In his influential *Speculum historiale* he quoted Isidore of Seville to the effect that Circe's sorcery ought to be taken at face value. There were reliably documented cases, he maintained, in which humans had been transformed into animals "*non fabulose mendacio, sed historica affirmatione*."³³ As late as the 1490s Jacopo Filippo Foresti, perhaps in order to alleviate some uneasiness about Circe's story, claimed that St. Augustine had said that it was true.³⁴ Dante and Boccaccio were both satisfied that the woman named Circe had once lived on a promontory named for her, near Gaeta in Campania. Dante did not meet her in person when visiting Hell, but he met Ulysses and had no reason to doubt the Greek hero's account of his encounter with the sorceress.³⁵ Boccaccio discussed her in *De claris mulieribus*.³⁶ He complained that he could not find any records of her except in the works of poets. This being so, it was incumbent on him to offer explanations. As a rational mythologist he argued that she had been called the daughter of the sun on account of either her beauty or her knowledge of herbs or her skills of manipulation — three qualities that astrologers in their horoscopes attributed to the influence of the sun. As a moralist Boccaccio pointed to her loose life and her wiles. By her favours and tricks she had induced many a traveller to make a

³¹ For cases in point see above n. 27.

³² Augustinus, *De civitate Dei* 18.17-18.

³³ Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum historiale* cit.(1624) 35 (book 1.95). Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* 11.4.

³⁴ Foresti, *De plurimis ... mulieribus* cit. 27v. (ch. 29). For Foresti see below p. 161. Contrary to Foresti, the *Malleus maleficarum* (1486) thoroughly rejects such transformations; see Heinrich Krämer and Jacob Sprenger, *Malleus Malificarum* 1.10, transl. Montague Summers, new ed. (New York 1971) 61-65.

³⁵ Dante, *Inferno* 26.91; cf. *Purgatorio* 14.42.

³⁶ See below n. 52.

base beast of himself. Erasmus offered the same moral interpretation among the just mentioned "*exempla fabulosa*" of *De copia*, but to him the tale ("*Circes fabula*") is purely allegorical. It means that "those who fail utterly to accept the guidance of reason, which is the properly human thing to do, and instead throw themselves away to shameful passions, have nothing human left to them except the empty name."³⁷ In Erasmus' *Panegyricus* we find that "as the story goes (*ut est in fabulis*)," Ulysses had a good time with Circe and Calypso, but in the end preferred harsh Ithaca to nectar and ambrosia in the company of those goddesses. Homer himself dispels any presumption of Ulysses' historicity by calling him *ageraos*, never ageing.³⁸ In *De pueris instituendis*, finally, Erasmus recommended the use of "*poetarum fabulae*" in school. Circe and Ulysses provide the example; "the story is laughable; and yet the child will learn ..."³⁹

III

Legendary Saints and the Heroes of Antiquity

For another two centuries, at least, the Trojan War and its champions easily retained their place in history. But if Erasmus' private scepticism thus failed to destroy the credibility of the Homeric heroes, in a great many other instances the credulity of the Middle Ages gave way to more rational perceptions of the past. In their passionate pilgrimage to the springs of classical culture Renaissance humanists were learning to give precedence to primary sources over copied or rehashed material and to follow them critically and selectively rather than blindly. Technical tools of source criticism were discovered, such as the demonstration of anachronisms, which enabled Lorenzo Valla to disprove the authenticity of Constantine's Donation.⁴⁰ We have

³⁷ Erasmus, ASD I-6 236, cf. 265, and *Parabolae*, ASD I-5 112, 146.

³⁸ Erasmus, ASD IV-1 36.

³⁹ Erasmus, ASD I-2 66.

⁴⁰ Lorenzo Valla, *De falso credita et ementita Constantini donatione declamatio* ed. C.B. Coleman with an English translation (New Haven, Conn. 1922). On the other hand, in 1510 the Neapolitan humanist Antonio De Ferraris 'Galateo' presented Pope Julius II with a copy of what he claimed to be the original Greek document of Constantine's Donation; see Ludwig von Pastor, *The History of the Popes from the Close of the Middle Ages*, ed. and tr. R.F. Kerr et al. (London

seen already how Platina chiseled away at the legend of Constantine and Silvester I, and Panvinio at that of Silvester II. Platina also disposed of Pope Cyriacus, and Aventinus of the Popess Joan.⁴¹ Jacobus a Voragine himself, who had done so much to perpetuate the pious legends, came under fire and was ridiculed by Juan Luis Vives (1492-1540) as a man “with a mouth of iron and a heart of lead.”⁴²

The medieval saints’ legends, which Jacobus a Voragine had collected so diligently, were singled out for devastating scrutiny, although the process was erratic. Already Petrarch was apt to distrust all accounts of miracles. He even refused to ascribe the stigmata of St. Francis to a supernatural cause and cleverly proposed what we might call a psychosomatic explanation.⁴³ But Petrarch also wrote hexameters in praise of St. Mary Magdalen,⁴⁴ and in the 1490s Foresti inserted them in his full account of the popular legend that had the Magdalen together with her siblings, Martha and Lazarus, travel to the south of France where she lived for thirty years as an hermitess and converted a good many pagans. Foresti, in turn, was reprinted at Paris in 1521, in a collection of texts about famous women gathered by the French humanist Jean Tixier de Ravisi.⁴⁵ It is true that Mary Magdalen was special in that she was one of France’s most popular saints. In 1517 Jacques Lefèvre d’Etaples had caused an intensive international controversy when he attacked her legend. He challenged the popular assumption that the Gospel passages referring to Mary Magdalen, Mary of Bethany and the sinner of Luke 7.37, all concerned a single woman. His view was perfectly sound; it had been anticipated by the Greek Fathers and was soon to be repeated by the protestant reformers, but it incurred the condemnation of the Paris Faculty of Theology.⁴⁶ Mary Magdalen was venerated in the great pilgrimage centres of Vézelay and La Sainte-Baume and also in scores

1891-1953) V 138f. Agostino Steuco also opposed Valla: *Contra L. Vallam, de falsa Donatione Constantini* (Lyons 1547). On the Renaissance “discovery” of anachronism, see also Borchardt, *German Antiquity in Renaissance Myth* cit. 299f.

⁴¹ See above pp. 84f., 88, 101, 112.

⁴² Juan Luis Vives, *De disciplinis* (1531) in *Opera omnia* (Valencia 1782-90) VI 108.

⁴³ Francesco Petrarca, *Epistolae seniles* 8.3.

⁴⁴ Petrarca, *Epistolae seniles* 14.17.

⁴⁵ *De memorabilibus et claris mulieribus aliquot diversorum scriptorum opera*, ed. Joannes Ravisius Textor (Paris 1521) 58r-60v (ch. 72 in Foresti’s collection).

⁴⁶ Jacques Lefèvre d’Etaples, *De Maria Magdalena et triduo Christi disceptatio* (Paris 1517). Cf. *The Prefatory Epistles of Jacques Lefèvre d’Etaples and Related Texts* ed. Eugene F. Rice (New York 1972) Ep. 124 introd.; Anselm Hufstader, “Lefèvre d’Etaples and the Magdalen” *Studies in the Renaissance* 16 (1969) 31-60.

of humble parish churches throughout the country. In short, she was a national institution; attacking her was unpatriotic as well as impious. Typically, many humanists suppressed their sceptical penchant when national sentiment was involved.

It was Erasmus, however, who, before the protestants,⁴⁷ warred most assiduously against legendary saints and their popular cult. In the *Praise of Folly* (1511), for instance, he noted

the foolish but pleasurable belief that if they see some carving or painting of that towering Polyphemus, Christopher, they're sure not to die that day... They've already got a second Hippolytus [the third-century martyr, namesake of the son of Theseus], but in George they've found another Hercules too. They piously deck out his horse with trappings and amulets and practically worship it.⁴⁸

With Christopher and George, Erasmus managed to pick cases where contemporary, and in fact enduring, popularity was matched by a complete lack of historical data. He certainly has a point when he suspected that Christian superstition might here have its roots in ancient pagan magic. From the thirteenth century onwards Christian hagiolatry had gained unprecedented popularity. Erasmus was no more immune against its charms than were other Renaissance humanists,⁴⁹ but at the same time classical Antiquity loomed too large on the humanist horizon for the Christian saints to retain a monopolistic position. As the humanists saw it, classical culture was compatible with, and even conducive to, Christian piety. When saints were not revered as unreachable ideals of human perfection but invoked as exemplary teachers of the kind of conduct ordinary mortals should strive to imitate, the great men and women of Antiquity would begin to match their lessons of lofty morality.

⁴⁷ The great scholarly scrutiny of the saints' legends, begun in the early seventeenth century by the Bollandists, was in some measure prompted by protestant attacks upon the most obscure, bizarre and lascivious legends. A good example is Luther's suitably annotated edition of an obscure legend of St. John Chrysostom: *Die Lügend* [a play on words associating legend with lying] von S. Johanne Chrysostomo (Wittenberg 1537), which in turn was censured in a pamphlet by the Catholic humanist and polemicist Johannes Cochlaeus. See Martin Luther, *Werke* (Weimar 1883 —) 50:48-64.

⁴⁸ Erasmus, ASD IV-3 122. The translation is Betty Radice's in *Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto 1974) 27.114.

⁴⁹ See e.g. Eugene F. Rice, *Saint Jerome in the Renaissance* (Baltimore 1985) 84-136; P.G. Bietenholz, "Erasmus von Rotterdam und der Kult des Heiligen Hieronymus" in *Poesis et Pictura. Festschrift für Dieter Wuille* ed. S. Füssel and J. Knappe (Baden-Baden 1989) 191-221.

When Petrarch visited Cologne (*Colonia Agrippina*) in 1333, he first turned to the “monuments of Roman greatness,” the ancient ruins that bore witness to the foundation of that colony by the legions of the Empire. These, to Petrarch, were “our ancestors.” Above all he was reminded of Marcus Agrippa, “the matchless builder and warrior,” whose memory was perpetuated in the city’s name. Afterwards he turned to the medieval tourist attractions, the relics of the Eleven Thousand Virgins and the Three Magi. He was told that the Virgins’ relics so ennobled the soil in which they were buried that it had expelled all other bodies laid to rest in the same place, while the Magi had been translated from the Orient to the Occident “in three leaps” (that is, they had reached Cologne by way of Constantinople and Milan). It is true that Petrarch describes himself as praying (“*venerabundus*”) at the tomb of the Magi, but since all he has to report of either site is a miracle legend, his reverence seems closer to mockery than to worship.⁵⁰ A few years later Petrarch decided that just as the churchmen collected the lives of their saints, so humanism’s alternative saints ought to be admired in conspectus. Inspired by classical precedent, he began his collection *De viris illustribus*. A first series of twenty-two biographies covered mostly Romans, beginning with Romulus, although it did include Alexander the Great, Pyrrhus and Hannibal. A short preface to this series leaves no doubt as to Petrarch’s opinion that all were historical. During a stay at his beloved Vaucluse, 1351-53, Petrarch returned to the project and added another twelve sketches of mostly Old-Testament patriarchs, beginning with Adam, but also finding room for Jason, Hercules and, as a sole woman, Semiramis.⁵¹

Boccaccio resolved to do for famous women what his older friend had done for men and, beginning in 1355, composed *De claris mulieribus*, a series of 106 pen-portraits reaching from Eve to Joanna I of Naples (ruled 1343-81). Although he acknowledged Petrarch as his source of inspiration, Boccaccio did not follow his example closely. Not only were the last six of his famous women Christians, he also practised his usual Euhemerism, including a number of pagan goddesses along with mythological and historical heroines and even

⁵⁰ Francesco Petrarca, *Familiares* 1.5 (4); *Le Familiari* ed. V. Rossi (Florence 1933-42) I 28-31.

⁵¹ Francesco Petrarca, *De viris illustribus* ed. Guido Martelotti (Florence 1964): II-1 in the *Edizione nazionale delle opere*; II-2 to come.

the tale of Procris, mentioned above.⁵² Unlike Petrarch, he never claimed that all his subjects were historical; he was content to find that each was in her own way exemplary. Nor would all of them exemplify virtues and actions worthy of imitation; some, like the popess Joan, were there to demonstrate the calamitous consequences of vice. But in the point that matters here Boccaccio followed Petrarch. He emphasized in his preface that he wished to give the pagan women their due just because they were not alive in Paradise and commemorated in the traditional books of saints. How by the end of the fifteenth century the old and the new exemplars could coexist in the mind of an average cleric is well elucidated by the Augustinian Hermit Jacopo Filippo Foresti (1434-1520) of Bergamo, author of another catalogue of famous women. Foresti's biographies range from Eve, the Holy Virgin and a large contingent of woman saints to such prodigies of Renaissance learning as Isotta Nogarola and Cassandra Fedele, treating en route such ultimate examples of female depravity as Cleopatra, Agrippina and Faustina. The question of historicity is almost completely avoided. Legendary figures like Circe, Helen, Penelope, Camilla and Mary Magdalen are treated alongside contemporary woman monarchs and Joan of Arc.⁵³

As the pagan heroes joined the Christian saints on the humanists' calendar, or even replaced them, a problem arose that had earlier intrigued the Fathers and the scholastic theologians, but only now began to receive so much attention that it must be considered a distinctive element of Renaissance thought. Pagans, even the most admirable ones, could not go to Heaven, although — like Dante's Virgil — they sometimes could hold the torch behind their backs and enlighten the path of salvation for those who followed while themselves they were stumbling in the dark.⁵⁴ Was this just? And was it true? Even the church tradition conceded some, albeit probably rare, exceptions. To humanists and humanistic-minded theologians the fate of the virtuous pagans became a major concern. Did Socrates or Cato deserve Hell? Did Hercules who, most of them thought, had

⁵² See above p. 151f. Boccaccio, *De claris mulieribus* 28, 101, in *Tutte le opere*, ed. Branca cit. X 24-28, 120-23, 414-16. There is an English transl. with an introd. and notes by Guido A. Guarino (New Brunswick, N.J. 1963).

⁵³ Jacopo Filippo Foresti, *De plurimis claris selectisque mulieribus* (Ferrara 1497). This first edition is illustrated with many fine woodcuts; a very few of them are perhaps authentic portraits.

⁵⁴ Dante, *Purgatorio* 22.67-69.

likewise been a man? Those who addressed the problem did not create new myths, nor did they debunk old ones. The debate as to whether the pagan luminaries had merited Heaven or Hell may even have detracted interest from the question whether they were historical or fictional. The problem is, however, ancillary to our investigation in that it sharpened the focus on many mythical and semi-mythical characters both from classical literature and the Old Testament; we shall therefore return to it in Appendix I.

IV

Joan of Arc

We shall have to look again at the serial treatment of the heroes of the past when turning to the Renaissance obsession with genealogy.⁵⁵ First, however, we shall narrow our focus and deal with the myths that were woven around three individuals, namely Joan of Arc, William Tell and Arminius. All three myths are genuine products of the renaissance period. They were chosen because each of these three figures casts forward a long shadow that reaches well into the twentieth century. Indeed, longevity is such a prominent feature that it will be necessary here to expand our time frame well beyond the Renaissance.

A passion to some like Boccaccio, to others a fashion, classical mythology was studied everywhere in the Renaissance. Ancient myths were revived and new ones appeared. To be sure, the field into which new myths were to be sown had first to be cleared of the tares of medieval fabulizing. As alluring as the new fantasies were, they were still grounded on Renaissance rationalism. Virgil was disrobed of the magician's cloak he had worn so happily in the Middle Ages.⁵⁶ The historical Alexander the Great was obliged to part company with the

⁵⁵ See below pp. 199-206.

⁵⁶ For a fine example of medieval phantasies about Virgil, see Jean des Preis called Outremeuse, *Le Myreur des histors* ed. Ad. Borgnet (Stanislas Bormans), (Brussels 1864-87) I 226-41; cf. below p. 192. See also John Webster Spargo, *Virgil the Necromancer* (Cambridge, Mass. 1934); *Virgil 2000 Jahre. Rezeption in Literatur, Musik und Kunst* ed. Werner Taegert (Bamberg 1982).

hero of the medieval romance who had conquered Rome and Carthage, fettered Gog and Magog, travelled the western ocean and explored the bottom of the sea in a submarine.⁵⁷ It is true that King Arthur, for the time being, escaped demotion, but he owed his survival to the same innovative and energizing force that fended for the French maid, the Swiss marksman and the Germanic prince. That force was national sentiment. Again we can turn to Petrarch for initial examples. As an Italian patriot he not only ignored the legendary Alexander, he also hated the historical one. Alexander, as Petrarch saw him, was a brutal and whimsical tyrant. It was said that he had plans to follow up his conquest of Asia with a sweep through Africa, Spain and Italy. Whether this was true was irrelevant. Even the idea that he might have wanted to conquer Rome and its empire was preposterous to Petrarch. His finest heroes were Romans, and republican Romans at that: Junius Brutus, the founder of free, republican Rome, and above all Scipio Africanus, its greatest general.⁵⁸

A patriotism, no longer restricted to the narrow confines of one's native city or district, was also a common force in the rise of our three figures. Joan of Arc came first; in the second quarter of the fifteenth century she began her long journey toward becoming the embodiment of the French national spirit. This status she achieved most fully four centuries later in the work of Jules Michelet.⁵⁹ The real Joan of Arc, however, remained elusive for a long time. Not until Jules Quicherat's momentous edition of the trial records (1841-49) did the breathtaking intricacy of Joan's drama and the roles played by its various protagonists begin to resurface. But not even the trial records can shed much light on what remains the most puzzling of all questions regarding the Maid, namely whether she died an unbroken martyr or a confessed and repentant sinner. Even as Joan was burnt on the stake, French chroniclers were busy narrating her story. On the

⁵⁷ George Cary, *The Medieval Alexander* (Cambridge 1956) esp. 226-74, 333-35. Cary develops refined analytical criteria and shows that there is no clear trend to replace a legendary with a historical tradition. It is illuminating, however, to compare Vincent of Beauvais, *Seculum historiale* cit. (1624) 117-36 (book 4) with Petrarch's *De viris illustribus*, ch. 15, and the elder Pier Paolo Vergerio (Cary 267, 375-77). Parallel to such humanistic enlightenment one might notice the great popularity and intensive circulation of Alexander romances in sixteenth century editions. On Gog and Magog see above pp. 121-28.

⁵⁸ Petrarch, *De viris illustribus*, chs. 5 and 21; also Petrarch's *Africa*; cf. Cary, *The Medieval Alexander* cit. 266f.

⁵⁹ See below pp. 347-50.

whole they did it with reasonable objectivity,⁶⁰ although they were divided into two opposing camps. The Burgundian chroniclers did, of course, not share the enthusiasm of their Armagnac counterparts, who saw her as a valiant patriot and saintly victim. A new tradition developed as evocations in poems and mystery plays were added and foreign chroniclers joined the French in reporting Joan's story. Apart from repeating some of the well-known facts about her, these writers regularly attempted to cope with Joan's perplexing uniqueness by way of relating her to familiar exemplars of both the mythological and historical past, a device that is not found in the French chronicles. As a result, Joan presents an interesting and rather sad case of vibrant *historia* being watered down with sedative dosages of stereotype *fabula*, almost as soon as the dramatic events had reached their tragic climax.

The process began in 1429, the year of Joan's great triumphs. In that year, Christine de Pisan (1364 — c.1430) broke a long silence to extol Joan's exploits in her last known poem. In Joan God had uniquely honoured the female sex; in her stupendous deeds she surpassed Esther, Judith and Deborah. Her miracles were worthy of comparison with a Moses, a Joshua and a Gideon. With God's help she outshone Hector and Achilles on the battleground as she set out to reconquer the Holy Land of France from the English Saracens.⁶¹ Such comparisons, both biblical and classical, were bound to be repeated endlessly. Also, Christine had probably not invented them. Esther, Judith and Deborah figure together in a treatise *De quadam puella*, written some months earlier by Jean Gerson,⁶² while an anonymous Latin poem on the relief of Orléans, preserved among the manuscripts of the trial for rehabilitation, juxtaposed Joan to Esther, Judith and even the Virgin Mary.⁶³ That same poem hailed Joan with a rich embroidery of classical myth. Penthesilea, the Amazon queen,

⁶⁰ *Procès de condamnation et de réhabilitation de Jeanne d'Arc dite La Pucelle* ed. Jules Quicherat (Paris 1841-49, repr. 1965) IV: "Témoignages des chroniqueurs et historiens du XVe siècle." This is a convenient collection of contemporary and near-contemporary texts referring to Joan (many of which are also available in more recent editions). See also Robert Hanhart, *Das Bild der Jeanne d'Arc in der französischen Historiographie vom Spätmittelalter bis zur Aufklärung* (Basel 1955) 12ff.

⁶¹ Quicherat cit. V 3-21. Deborah Fraioli "The Literary Image of Joan of Arc: Prior Influences" *Speculum* 56 (1981) 811-30.

⁶² Fraioli, "The Literary Image..." cit., 815.

⁶³ Quicherat cit. V 24-43, esp. 35, 39. For other sources listing the same and similar biblical and classical comparisons, see Warner, *Joan of Arc* cit. ch. 10: "Amazon."

and another warrior queen, Semiramis, who dressed like a man and pretended to be her own son, even the virgin queen Camilla, worthy to fight Aeneas — they all paled in comparison with Joan. Aeneas himself, together with Pyrrhus, Ulysses and Hercules, came to the anonymous poet's mind as he laboured to express his admiration for the French Maid. Christine also knew of very old prophecies uttered by Merlin, the Sibyl and Bede, who had foretold "*qu'el pourteroit bannière es guerres françoises.*" The prophecies of Merlin and Bede were quoted repeatedly in the rehabilitation trial and elsewhere.⁶⁴ The Sibyllic model was elaborated in a dissertation written in 1429 by an unidentified cleric of the diocese of Speyer. Here Joan, the "*Sibylla francica,*" finds her niche among the traditional sibyls and also between such northern prophetesses as Hildegard of Bingen and Bridget of Sweden.⁶⁵

Amid the stereotype repetitions of such metaphors, only two more Renaissance appraisals of Joan may be mentioned in passing, because they are among the most curious ones. In the 1490s Jacopo Filippo Foresti recalled her in his book on famous women. His biography of Joan is puzzlingly replete with factual inaccuracies and thus can illustrate the degree to which an oral tradition had formed by then. Foresti fully believes in Joan's divine mission, but in Italian humanist fashion he sees her primarily as a *virago*. Apart from doing her domestic chores, the young girl also exercises with a lance, driving it deeply into tree trunks.⁶⁶ Guillaume Postel (1510-81) was a French patriot and eccentric scholar of universal breadth, but frequently hovering on the edge of insanity. Postel found that Joan was the best, but by no means only, proof for the saviour mission that God had assigned to the French nation in universal history. He also jumbled our heroine, Jeanne la Pucelle, with his very own Mère Jehanne, a contemporary Venetian visionary, in whom he had discerned the *mater mundi* and New Eve. She was ushering in an eschatological turning point of Joachite parentage, with a discreet role falling to Postel himself. As her spiritual son he was none other than the new Cain or John, the prophet of the final age. Perhaps the confusion was not even deliberate when a pamphlet, published at Paris in 1557, claimed that the "most accursed" Postel "called himself the son of a virgin Joan,

⁶⁴ Quicherat cit. III 133, 338-42, IV 305, 480f.

⁶⁵ Quicherat cit. III 422-68, V 475f. For the traditional sibyls see above pp. 74, 128f.

⁶⁶ Foresti, *De plurimis claris ... mulieribus* cit. 144r-145v (ch. 157).

who, say the chronicles, a long time ago drove the English out of France."⁶⁷

The stereotypes were to prevail for a long time. Shakespeare, in the first part of the *King Henry VI* trilogy (c. 1589), has the French hail Joan as an Amazon and a Deborah as well as a holy prophetess and the new patron saint of the nation. He also shows her practising witchcraft. When the helping "fiends" defect, she is captured and burnt without ado. Her last and ineffective resort are desperate lies: she claims to be the "progeny of kings" rather than a shepherd girl, and even to be with child. The first of these claims may be of Shakespeare's own invention. The second was also unknown in Joan's life-time, but, half a century later, seems to have had some currency in England. In the same way, Joan's sorcery seems to have preoccupied Shakespeare's contemporaries more than it did the early chroniclers. The tradition carried on, and no startling inventions are to be registered for the better part of two centuries until Voltaire's ribald *Pucelle d'Orléans*, a parody on chivalresque epics.⁶⁸ As part of Voltaire's continual plays on the tradition Deborah, Judith, Goliath and the Amazons are once more beckoned to Joan's side,⁶⁹ but the central strand in the meandering epic action is of his own invention. Joan is a healthy, robust peasant girl, working as a waitress in a country pub, before she is discovered by St. Denis and chosen to save France. In the ensuing adventures her highest achievement is to preserve her maidenhood for one more year. The greatest danger to it comes from a love-sick ass who is her faithful mount. Far from creating a trend, Voltaire's comical persiflage became the object of much pious and patriotic outrage, especially in the nineteenth century. At least it had decisively shown the sterility of the old tradition and the need to ask new questions, if Joan were to spring back to life. Friedrich Schiller's play, *Die Jungfrau von Orleans* (1801), restored

⁶⁷ Quoted in William J. Bouwsma, *Concordia Mundi. The Career and Thought of Guillaume Postel (1510-1581)* (Cambridge, Mass. 1957) 24, cf. 160, 221f. and passim; also Warner, *Joan of Arc* cit. 221f. Guillaume Postel, *Les très merveilleuses victoires des femmes du nouveau-monde* [in a spiritual, not a geographical sense] *et comme elles doivent à tout le monde par raison commander, et mesme à ceulx qui auront la monarchie du monde vieil* (Paris 1553).

⁶⁸ An authorized version of the poem was published in 1762, but several pirated editions circulated since 1755. The preface in the name of Don Apuleius Risorius Bénédictin claims that other works, such as Luigi Pulci's *Morgante*, are more irreverent by far; see *Les Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire*, ed. T. Bestermann et al. VII: *La Pucelle d'Orléans* ed. J. Verduysee (Geneva 1970) 253-57.

⁶⁹ *La Pucelle d'Orléans* 2.215-25, 368, 13.134.

the heroic image. He even had Joan die on the battlefield. The reality, her being burnt at the stake, would have offended his view of dramatic decorum. The principal act of romanticization, however, was not Joan's death, but Schiller's recourse to the old theme of a conflict between Amazon valour and sexual attraction. Although Schiller's play was a protest against Voltaire's desecration of all that Joan represented by way of ideals,⁷⁰ both authors have that much in common that their quest was not for historical fact. The fifteenth century did not particularly matter. Voltaire's naughty satire is timeless in scope and *siècle des lumières* in taste. Schiller likewise strove to capture the unchanging values of the romantic heart and also to instil in his contemporaries a sense of patriotic hope badly needed in the days of Napoleonic domination.

Another flight from *historia* into the realm of *fabula* occurred in the work of Pierre Caze, an obscure civil servant in early nineteenth-century France. Caze devoted much time and energy to an *idée fixe* that was to enrich the world with the strangest of all fables concerning Joan. His contention that Joan really was a bastard daughter of the French queen, Isabella of Bavaria, and her brother-in-law, Louis of Orléans, is finding spirited advocates even today.⁷¹ If one wishes to share the conviction of Caze and his followers, one must assume that royal children are being exposed, in real life just as in fairy tales, and that no adequate explanation is required as to why of all people the farmer Jacques d'Arc and his wife at Domrémy should have been chosen to raise the girl incognito. Moreover, since this curious theory also presumes that she learnt her true identity before she embarked on her historical role, one is forced to accept that she begins her testimony at the trial with a bevy of blatant lies, whereas in all other matters she clearly spoke the truth. One would also have to marvel

⁷⁰ Warner, *Joan of Arc* cit. 238-41; Ingvald Raknem, *Joan of Arc in History, Legend and Literature* (Oslo 1971) 96-122; also Vercruyse's introd. in *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire* cit. VII 197, 199. For references to contemporary issues and personalities, *ibid.* 156f. Voltaire himself provided a series of didactic notes for his poem.

⁷¹ Caze first expounded his theory in the preliminary material to a tragedy about Joan, which he published in 1805. Fourteen years later he elaborated his thesis in a work of two volumes: *La Vérité sur Jeanne d'Arc, ou éclaircissements sur son origine* (Paris 1819); cf. Warner, *Joan of Arc* cit. 59. It seems unlikely that Caze's thesis has anything to do with Joan's spontaneous statement at her trial, that neither a hundred fathers and mothers nor being a king's daughter would have prevented her from leaving Domrémy, or with the desperate lie (mentioned above) that Shakespeare put in her mouth. A recent re-elaboration of Caze's theory is Edouard Schneider, *Jeanne et ses lys. La légende et l'histoire* (Paris 1952).

how in the face of the most incredible odds she succeeded in keeping her secret completely intact.

This is not the place to review the amazingly wide spectrum of literary elaborations and also of exploitations for the sake of political propaganda, to which Joan was subjected in the last two centuries. Jules Michelet, who knew Christine de Pisan's poem,⁷² did the decisive step beyond the Renaissance admiration for the *virago* — the tough Maid, who had instigated France's national survival and triumph. In the fervour of his romantic enthusiasm, Michelet brilliantly succeeded in restoring her to feminine tenderness. Above all, he associated her so closely with the *persona* of *La France, la patrie* that the two almost became one.⁷³ Before that, Joan had been presented as the prefiguration, more specifically, of the French Revolution, particularly so in the literary work of an Englishman, Robert Southey (d. 1843), and an American, John Burk (d. 1808).⁷⁴ In the wake of Michelet it is tempting to associate Joan with Eugène Delacroix's 'Liberty' leading the Paris citizens on the barricades of June 1830. This virginal figure in her Phrygian bonnet, with the tricolour in one hand and a rifle in the other, looks like an obvious link between Joan of Arc and the allegorical figure of republican liberty, dubbed 'Marianne' at first contemptuously in 1792-93, but fondly ever since the Revolution of 1848, and omnipresent even now on French coins and postage stamps. This is how a contemporary recorded the events of 27-28 February 1830:

A young girl, a latter-day Joan of Arc, fought with extreme valour on the Place de la Bourse. There, despite the hail of bullets, she secured a piece of artillery. Her companions ... carried her to a throne in the Hôtel-de-

⁷² Jules Michelet, *Jeanne d'Arc* (Paris 1853) 43f. For comparisons with Judith and Gideon, see p.12. This is the first separate edition. Michelet's text appeared first in the fifth volume of his *Histoire de France*, 1841. Now see *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Viallaneix cit. VI 64, 77.

⁷³ Michelet, *Jeanne d'Arc* cit. The introduction (freshly written for the separate ed.) suffices to make the point: "*La pauvre fille, de sa chair pure et sainte, de ce corps délicat et tendre, a émoussé le fer, brisé l'épée ennemie, couvert de son sein le sein de la France*" (iv). Indeed, Joan has created France. She has invented the term "*Le sang de France!*" — *Ce mot qui va au coeur, c'est la première fois qu'on le dit. Pour la première fois, on le sent, la France est aimée comme une personne. Elle devient telle du jour qu'elle est aimée. C'était jusque-là une réunion de provinces, un vaste chaos de fiefs, grand pays, d'idée vague. Mais, dès ce jour, par la force du coeur, elle est une patrie*" (viif.). Joan "*aima tant la France! ... Et la France, touchée, se mit à s'aimer elle-même... Souvenons-nous toujours, Français, que la patrie chez nous est née du coeur d'une femme, de sa tendresse et de ses larmes, du sang qu'elle a donné pour nous*" (viii).

⁷⁴ Raknem, *Joan of Arc in History* cit. 76-95; Warner, *Joan of Arc* cit. 242-44.

Ville and crowned her with laurels. Then, on the 29th, in the evening, she was placed on a triumphal chariot ... and paraded throughout Paris.⁷⁵

But was the Maid of Orléans fit to be the patron of revolutionaries and secular-minded republicans? Many people were affronted by such claims on her. In 1920 Joan was canonized — largely in response to the agitation of right-wing political circles, but also in recognition of the popular devotions of pious souls through the centuries. She had assisted the French soldiers in the trenches of the First World War and would continue to protect France from the Marxist secularizers. On the other hand, republicans and socialists, their Michelet in mind, would continue to claim her as their own. In the Second World War, Vichy France as well as the Gaullist *Résistance* competed for her endearing image.⁷⁶

V

William Tell

Among the mythical characters created in the Renaissance only one perhaps can rival, and in a sense surpass, the historical impact of Joan of Arc. To this day the tale of William Tell does not lag behind Joan's as a source of symbols in common use. Like Joan-*'Marianne,'* it has inspired whole series of Swiss stamps as well as some coins. In the course of Swiss history it was made to serve diverse political ideologies and finally subjected to seemingly endless commercial exploitation. Friedrich Schiller, who in his *Jungfrau von Orleans* romanticized Joan almost beyond recognition, also seized upon the Tell saga. *Wilhelm Tell* appears to be Schiller's most enduring dramatic success and contributed immensely to the universal outreach

⁷⁵ Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne into battle. Republican imagery and symbolism in France, 1789-1880*, transl. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge-Paris 1981) 41f., also 30-34, 115-21, 197, and for a personal connection with Michelet and his second wife, Athénaïs Mialeret, 66. See also Pierre Larousse, *Grand Dictionnaire du XIX siècle* (Paris 1866-79) and subsequent editions s.v. *'Marianne.'* Warner, *Joan of Arc* cit. 256, describes Joan on a monument erected at Orleans in 1803 as "a species of Marianne, spirit of the Republic, seizing a flag from an English soldier."

⁷⁶ See the fine last chapter and the illustrations in Warner, *Joan of Arc* cit.

of the Swiss hero. Whereas Joan, beyond symbolizing *La France*, spoke mostly to the hearts of pious Catholics, William Tell, apart from representing Swissness to the small nation of his countrymen, thanks to Schiller became a symbol of liberty on every continent.

By 1470 the hero named Tell made his first appearance in a chronicle and a century later his saga had become an integral and indispensable part of the standard account of the events leading to Swiss independence. The developments, but dimly remembered by 1470, had taken place two hundred years earlier — ample space for the assimilation of historical figures and actions to the timeless archetypes of myth.⁷⁷ The recording was undertaken by a generation marked by great self-confidence. From inconspicuous beginnings in the high mountains, the Swiss Confederacy had grown to include fertile plains and rich cities. It had achieved de-facto sovereignty, and in 1476-77 it would destroy the powerful duke of Burgundy, Charles the Rash.⁷⁸ For the next half century its military strength would place it amid the ranking European powers. In short, the Swiss of the 1470s felt entitled to a proud and gratifying past, and their chroniclers set out to create it, beginning with the origins that lay buried in obscurity.

A first pact between the valleys of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden, located to the east and south of Lake Lucerne, has left no direct record. But it is mentioned in passing in a subsequent treaty of military assistance and legal co-operation, concluded at the beginning of August 1291.⁷⁹ The legal status of the contracting parties was unequal. Uri possessed impeccable proof of *Reichsunmittelbarkeit*, full sovereignty excepting only the powers of a — normally remote — emperor, but Schwyz and Unterwalden were not in such an enviable position. The extant treaty, and also its lost precedent, undoubtedly responded to pressures, both fair and foul, that were brought to bear upon the three small cantons by the counts of Habsburg. The counts had gradually come to own many feudal rights in the region and

⁷⁷ See below p. 402f.

⁷⁸ It is true that before and after the Burgundian Wars the young country was in the grip of a profound constitutional crisis. The poor cantons in the Alpine valleys believed that their economic and political survival was threatened by the rich cities and were determined to prevent any further expansion of the Confederacy. While later on the tale of Tell sometimes appealed to rebels and fighters for lost causes, the early versions, I think, reflect proud confidence rather than resilience in the face of adversity.

⁷⁹ *Quellenwerk zur Entstehung der Schweizerischen Eidgenossenschaft* (Aarau 1933 —) I Urkunden 1.776-83. Apart from this indispensable collection of the primary sources, see for what follows here: Jean-François Bergier, *Guillaume Tell* (Paris 1988).

clearly wanted yet more. These pressures had gained momentum with Rudolf I (1218 — 15 July 1291). For Rudolf was the first of his family to become duke of Austria, and from 1273 he also occupied the imperial throne. The accounts of the Swiss independence struggle recall attempts, whether real or invented, of unlawful dispossession and sexual harassment on the part of Habsburg officials. This is the environment in which the tale of Tell could take root. We only know it from chronicles written at a distance of two hundred years, where the gist is as follows.

In the valley of Uri, a Habsburg bailiff named Gessler has stuck his hat on a pole and orders the passers-by to do homage. Tell, a highlander known for his hunting skills with the crossbow, refuses to do so. To punish him, Gessler orders Tell to shoot an apple from the head of his little son. Tell accomplishes the feat, only to be questioned by Gessler why he had taken two arrows from his quiver. Tell finally admits that the second would have been aimed at Gessler himself, if the first should have harmed the child. He is condemned to imprisonment for life in Gessler's dungeon, but escapes from his tormentor's boat while they cross the treacherous lake in the thick of a gale. Tell saves himself by jumping on to a flat rock on the shore. Afterwards he lies in ambush for Gessler in a deep-cut valley, covered with wood, and kills the tyrant with his arrow. This is the signal for a general, and successful, rebellion against the Habsburg oppression.

The tale of Tell is comprised of elements that could be either historical or legendary and also of a well-known myth. The myth of the apple shot off a child's head originated in Norway. Around 1200 the Danish cleric Saxo Grammaticus in his *Gesta Danorum* attributed the feat to a champion named Toko. This Toko also anticipated Tell's action by reserving two arrows for his tormentor, for the case that he should hit his child. In other respects the two stories differ. Toko himself is historical. His adversary is not, as in Tell's case, a nebulous official of despotic disposition, but his legitimate sovereign, King Harald Bluetooth, the second Christian ruler of Denmark. In Saxo's tale Toko brings his ordeal upon himself as a punishment for his notorious bragging; thus his revenge would appear to be less justifiable than Tell's. Both kill their adversary from an ambush. The Danish king meets his fate while he has stepped behind a tree to answer the call of nature. An epitome of Saxo's chronicle, compiled around 1340, soon began to be spread in vernacular versions. In addition to this written source, the story may also have been disseminated orally; in any

event, the Scandinavian marksman became footloose. By the fifteenth century the apple shooter's tale was circulating in a variety of Danish, Icelandic, English and German versions, but once Tell had entered the stage, all his rivals were quickly fading. Only in Norway and the Faeroe Islands was the older tradition kept alive.⁸⁰

The Scandinavian tale could have reached the Swiss Forest cantons by the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The valley of Uri leads up to the St. Gotthard Pass, and there is ample evidence that just then trade with Lombardy across the Gotthard began to flourish. Scandinavian merchants or pilgrims headed for Rome could have carried the myth to Uri. A respected Swiss historian recently argued that the Habsburg bailiff might have heard the Scandinavian story and decreed Tell's punishment in imitation of it.⁸¹ But if this were what happened, not only the bailiff, but also Tell, who took two arrows from his quiver, and presumably even the bystanders ought to have been familiar with Toko's feat. Either the bailiff would have knowingly risked his life, or the myth would have been re-enacted as a kind of dramatic performance, that is to say, a play. Both alternatives are rather improbable.

A more weighty hypothesis is that in the second half of the fifteenth century the Scandinavian myth was superimposed upon the vague recollection of events that took place in Uri two centuries earlier. Two Swiss renderings, which may well be more archaic than the rest, present the nordic tale completely disjointed from their other subject matter. The first is a popular ballad. Composed in 1477, in the wake of the Swiss victories over Charles the Rash of Burgundy, it recalls the beginnings of the Confederation and culminates in a celebration of its latest triumphs. The ballad incorporates some stanzas on Tell's story in such an awkward way as to leave little doubt about their separate origin. They end with Tell's confession to Gessler or, in one version, with the hero's being sentenced to death by drowning in the lake. The other primitive form of the tale is found in a chronicle composed in 1482 by Melchior Russ of Lucerne. He

⁸⁰ Helmut de Boor, "Die nordischen, englischen und deutschen Darstellungen des Apfelschussmotivs," appendix to *Quellenwerk* cit. III *Chroniken* 1, reprinting many of the relevant texts. Bergier, *Guillaume Tell* cit., 84-94. Hans-Georg Wackernagel, "Bemerkungen zur älteren Schweizer Geschichte in volkscundlicher Sicht" in *Beiträge zur Volkskunde ... der Universität Basel dargebracht von der Schweizerischen Gesellschaft für Volkskunde* (Basel 1960) 1-24, esp. 18-24.

⁸¹ Bruno Meyer, *Weisses Buch und Wilhelm Tell*, 3rd ed. (Weinfelden 1985) 135-46.

reported the apple shooting incident in one place and, without connection, in another place Gessler's murder, having Tell shoot the bailiff directly from the flat rock after his jump from Gessler's boat.⁸² Before Russ, it was the *White Book of Sarnen*,⁸³ composed between 1470 and 1474, which initiated the laborious process of linking the Scandinavian myth with specific locations familiar to the chroniclers and their public — presumably the sites of factual events dimly remembered. The hat on the pole, which prompts Tell's insubordination, does not figure in the nordic tradition. As we have seen earlier,⁸⁴ even in ancient times reverence was due to the effigy of a ruler and other symbols of his authority. In the Middle Ages, the hat — like the flag — was used to assert feudal authority. To raise up a hat, like hoisting a flag, spelled out the subjects' obligation to show up for service, military or otherwise.⁸⁵ Uri was, as we have said, *reichsunmittelbar*. While Habsburg officials normally had no business there, an attempted hat-raising is not implausible during the reign of the Habsburg king, Rudolf I. In terms of topography, the details of the tale all make good sense: Tell, the marksman in the Alps of Uri, the gale on the south-eastern arm of Lake Lucerne, well known for its exposure to sudden storms, the rock protruding into these treacherous waters, and finally the hollow way, well suited for Tell's ambush, leading to Gessler's supposed residence in Küssnacht. As early as the first years of the sixteenth century Tell's rock was proudly shown to travellers, and by 1510 a chapel had been built on the site. Another chapel was erected in the hollow way of Küssnacht. Not that Tell had become a saint. If the chapels had been constructed two centuries earlier, at the time assigned to Tell's actions, their intent might have been to atone for an act of cold-blooded murder. In the sixteenth century, however, the intention was to honour, indeed to glorify, a hero who had gained legendary status.⁸⁶

⁸² *Quellenwerk* cit. III *Chroniken* 2,1. Melchior Russ, *Eidgenössische Chronik* ed. Joseph Schneller (Bern 1834) 58f., 63f. Cf. Bergier, *Guillaume Tell* cit. 71-79.

⁸³ *Quellenwerk* cit. III *Chroniken* 1. Tell's story (pages 14-19) is inserted in an artless fashion, disrupting the flow of the narrative.

⁸⁴ See above pp. 51-54.

⁸⁵ *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, ed. Bächtold-Stäubli cit. IV 528; *Quellenwerk* cit. III-1 15.

⁸⁶ In 1582 a third chapel was built in the village of Bürglen on the spot where William Tell's home was reputed to have stood. Its holy patrons were Saints William, Rochus and Sebastian. Sebastian, the protector of marksmen, was also the patron of the Rock chapel. See *Quellenwerk* cit. III *Chroniken* 1.18-20.

In contrast to subsequent battles between Habsburg armies and the Swiss, the turbulence preceding 1291 has left no immediate records. Perhaps this means that it was a series of single and for the most part unbloody incidents. The tradition subsequently recorded by the chroniclers suggests that in each of these incidents local notables showed their solidarity with, and even took charge of, the popular agitation. It seems entirely possible that the nordic myth was later fixed upon a conspicuous member of that local élite. It has been argued that around 1300 the crossbow, which Tell is sporting in the place of Toko's longbow, would have to be imported into the Swiss valleys at great cost and was certainly far from common.⁸⁷ The classical account of the Swiss independence struggle is the *Chronicon Helveticum* by Aegidius Tschudi (1505-72), to whom we shall return shortly.⁸⁸ Tschudi included Tell among the leading representatives of the three cantons, who met secretly at night on an meadow known as the Rütli to plot the joint attack upon the Habsburg strongholds. Schiller went even further in tying Tell to the local élite. He made him the son-in-law of Walter Fürst of Uri, one of the three chiefs to swear the crucial oath of solidarity on behalf of the three cantons. According to another tradition of later days, Tell is even offered a royal crown of Switzerland by his grateful fellow-citizens, but of course declines.⁸⁹

Tell's real or presumed ties to the local élite were never in conflict with his popularity among humbler folk. His story fits well into the social structures of Uri, where hunting in the high mountains must have produced skilled marksmen in all classes of the population. Beginning with the earliest records, the Swiss hero Tell is also given traits that would appear to be popular rather than aristocratic. He is described as simple and hot-blooded, somewhat lacking in prudent foresight — the kind of character that would appeal to ordinary folk and later to political radicals.⁹⁰ A popular tradition continued until well into the seventeenth century, which had various individuals

⁸⁷ Bergier, *Guillaume Tell* cit. 99-104, 345-49. The chronicles, however, mention Tell's crossbow without surprise in a matter-of-fact fashion, which fits the situation two hundred years later when the chronicles were composed and crossbows were common.

⁸⁸ See below p. 175.

⁸⁹ Bergier, *Guillaume Tell* cit. 402f.

⁹⁰ In the *White Book of Sarnen* Tell attempted to excuse his refusal to greet the hat by saying that if he were "witzig" (subtle), they would not call him Tell; see *Quellenwerk* cit. III *Chroniken* 1.14f. Both Aegidius Tschudi and Friedrich Schiller were aware of the conflicting traits ascribed to the hero and attempted to reconcile them.

assume the name of Tell — a name that originally was generic rather than personal. These latter-day Tells, obscure soldiers and leaders of youth gangs, were rather closer in spirit to reckless old Toko than to the idol of the educated chroniclers, who had presented their Tell as the dignified defender of human rights. Take the example of a major peasant rebellion that set aflame a large part of the Swiss Confederacy in the middle of the seventeenth century. One of its centres was the Entlebuch, a valley subject to Lucerne. On 28 December 1652, in the course of traditional amusements associated with Twelfth Night, the crowd “began to make a Tell (*man fing ... einen Tellen an*).” In fact three Tells, wearing appropriate costume, led the rioters. In September of the following year the three Tells ambushed and killed the envoys of the ruling council of Lucerne in the exact fashion ascribed to Tell’s murder of Gessler.⁹¹

In the middle of the sixteenth century the classic account of the Swiss independence struggle was produced by Aegidius Tschudi, a superior historian, gifted with a sense of drama and conscious of the exigencies of research and documentation. His logical mind succeeded, where earlier chroniclers had failed, in tightly connecting Tell’s single-handed action with the general rebellion. His achievement is all the more remarkable as at the bottom of his heart Tschudi was unsympathetic to his hero, whom he judged to be undisciplined and unable to grasp the need for co-ordination. Tschudi’s overriding concern was to present the general rebellion as a responsible action, entirely bloodless but for Gessler’s murder, and undertaken to ensure respect for the law.⁹² Tschudi died before he could complete his *Chronicon Helveticum*. When it finally appeared in print, 1734-36, it became the basis for much of the eighteenth century admiration for Tell. While foreign tourists joined the locals in the pilgrimage to Tell’s rock and the Rütli, the Swiss hero became a classic prototype for all men fighting for freedom. Inevitably, however, he was seen quite differently according to various concepts of freedom and order. From France, where he had made an early appearance,⁹³ his fame as

⁹¹ Hans Georg Wackernagel, “Bemerkungen zur älteren Schweizer Geschichte ...” cit. 12f. and passim for similar incidents.

⁹² Aegidius Tschudi, *Chronicon Helveticum* ed. Peter Stadler and Bernhard Stettler (Bern 1968—) Ia 451-54, III 230-33.

⁹³ André Thevet (d. 1590), who belonged to the entourage of Catherine of Medici, found room for Tell in his *Vrais pourtraits et vies des hommes illustres* (Paris 1584) II 496r-498v. For the most part Thevet was content to copy his text from the chronicle of Heinrich Pantaleon (see below n. 96). In the place of the unfamiliar Uri, Thevet regularly set “Lucerne” when he

a champion of liberty against tyranny spread to the American colonies fighting for their independence. But it was the French Revolution that carried the admiration for Tell to unprecedented heights. In the Terror even his murder of Gessler became an exemplary act of tyrannicide, and the busts of Brutus and Tell adorned the Club of the Jacobins. A little later the painter Jacques-Louis David sketched these two in the company of a Hercules, who bore the features of Napoleon Bonaparte.⁹⁴ Friedrich Schiller's play (1804) perpetuated the fame of the Swiss hero and spread it as far as China and Japan. Faced with the opposition of the Young Turks, Sultan Abdul-Hamid II (ruled 1876-1909) attempted to suppress a Turkish translation of the play, and in 1941 Adolf Hitler from his *Führer-Hauptquartier* directed that the play be removed from the curriculum of all German schools. In the Mediterranean world it may have been the opera of Gioacchino Rossini, first performed in Paris in 1829 at the peak of the Restoration period, that proved the most influential. Tell was acknowledged by the revolutionaries of 1848-49, especially in Hungary, where playing cards perpetuate his image to this day. In the period between the two World Wars he was also claimed by international communism, especially in the Spanish Civil War. And in February 1969 a commando "William Tell" of the Palestinian Al-Fatah organization carried out a bloody attack on an Israeli air-liner at Zurich airport.⁹⁵

By the standards of their time the early Swiss chroniclers were historians of unquestionable integrity and professionalism. They did not invent Tell; when they set to work, the nordic apple shooting feat was clearly known in the forest cantons and was attributed to a local

translated Pantaleon's text. Elsewhere too, Tell's fame was winning out over geographical knowledge. In the early nineteenth century an American etching transferred Tell's Rock to Lake Geneva. Popular awareness of Tell, the liberator, and soon the republican, was enhanced by Antoine-Marin Lemierre's play *Guillaume Tell*, which was first performed in the Théâtre Français in 1766; see Bergier, *Guillaume Tell* cit. 420f.

⁹⁴ Bergier, *Guillaume Tell* cit. 421-30. Lilly Stunzi et al., *Tell. Werden und Wandern eines Mythos* (Berne 1973) 112f. and passim, for a fine portfolio of Tell illustrations. David's sketch, intended for the curtain of the Paris Opera House, is based on a drawing made in 1793, which did not yet show Napoleon's likeness. Other figures in Hercules' train, apart from Brutus, are contemporary martyrs of the French Revolution.

⁹⁵ Carl Brockelmann, *History of the Islamic Peoples*, tr. J. Carmichael and M. Perlmann (London 1949) 392. Bergier, *Guillaume Tell* cit. 410, 424-30. Hitler's order must be seen in the light of the continued popularity of Schiller's play in Germany from the days of heady nationalism at the outbreak of the war against France in 1870 to the months following the defeat of 1918 when audiences rose to their feet to repeat the Rütli oath and subsequently sing the national anthem, *Deutschland über alles*.

hero of days bygone. The chroniclers merely gathered information and then combined the data, as historians are supposed to do. Since no chronological points of reference were available, Tell's integration into the general anti-Habsburg rebellion was logical and justified. It was well advanced by 1565, when the Basel physician and humanist Heinrich Pantaleon entitled his short biography of the hero: *Wilhelmus Tellus Helvetici foederis author*, soundly assigning the described events to the years immediately preceding the first safe date at his disposal, that of the battle of Morgarten, 1315. Pantaleon's full merit as a historian is best revealed by the marginal note of another biography. 240 pages before reaching Tell, he devoted a short text to *Toko miles Daniae* and, in doing so, drew attention to the puzzling similarity of Toko's story with that of Tell.⁹⁶ Pantaleon left it to his readers to draw their own conclusions from that intriguing parallel, and the same restraint prevailed for another two hundred years. Then, in 1760, at the height of enlightened Pyrrhonism, the veil of discretion was impudently lifted. Under the title *Guillaume Tell, fable danoise*, a treatise was published anonymously in Berne, the French version being duplicated by a German one. It had been penned eight years earlier by an obscure minister named Uriel Freudenberger.⁹⁷ Unlike Voltaire's *Pucelle*, which was then circulating among the *philosophes* and their crowd,⁹⁸ Freudenberger's book was not farcical, but it too breathed the irreverent spirit of the Age of Reason. And like Voltaire's attack on Joan of Arc, it caused outrage. The government of Uri had it publicly burnt by the hangman. The leading Swiss historian of that period, Johannes von Müller, eliminated the hat and the apple shot from the first edition of his history (1778), but then softened his stand with every subsequent revision until Tell's deeds shone forth again in pristine splendour.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Heinrich Pantaleon, *Prosopographia heroum atque illustrium virorum totius Germaniae* (Basel 1565-66) II 73f.: "Similem fere historiam postea apud Helvetios a Vuilhelmo Tello contigisse patet, quae suo loco declarabitur. Saxo Grammaticus in Hist. Daniae lib. 10." For Tell see II 310-12. Pantaleon was meticulous in revealing his sources, in the case of Tell the chronicle of Johannes Stumpf, first printed in 1547. The first edition of Saxo Grammaticus (Paris 1514) was reprinted at Basel in 1534.

⁹⁷ The instigator, and eventually the editor, was the Bernese patrician and antiquarian Gottlieb Emanuel von Haller, son of the famous Albrecht von Haller; see Bergier, *Guillaume Tell* cit. 84f.; Richard Feller and Edgar Bonjour, *Geschichtsschreibung der Schweiz vom Spätmittelalter zur Neuzeit* (Basel 1962) II 467.

⁹⁸ See above p. 166.

⁹⁹ See below pp. 344-46.

It is not surprising that patriotic loyalty should have militated, and often won, against these early instances of scholarly scepticism. As much had happened both in Graeco-Roman times and in the Renaissance. Some of those supposedly mortal blows to the historicity of Tell appear now excessive and motivated by the politics of the day. When the Jacobins, and subsequently the Romantics and the Liberals, claimed Tell for their own sides, they succeeded in creating opposition to him in the very heartland of the Swiss Confederacy. Although his own Uri remained ever faithful, some conservative politicians of the city of Lucerne were prepared to write him off. It was Lucerne that commissioned Bertel Thorwaldsen to create a splendid monument to the memory of the royal Swiss guards who had been massacred while defending the Tuileries palace. The inauguration took place on 10 August 1821, which was the twenty-ninth anniversary of the massacre. Here the terrorist Tell was being replaced by loyalist martyrs. The government of Lucerne was firmly on the side of the Restoration. The political bias of the dedication ceremony was not lost on a high school teacher of the same city of Lucerne. As a protest to his government and a homage to Tell, he chose that day to take his pupils to the hollow way near Küssnacht, where Gessler had died from Tell's arrow.¹⁰⁰ Twenty years later, however, another high school teacher in Lucerne, Joseph Eutyck Kopp, left no stone unturned to gather scholarly evidence against Tell's existence. Kopp was a democrat, but also a devout Catholic. His admiration for the early Habsburg counts and emperors neatly coincided with the politics of Lucerne, which led the conservative cantons of Switzerland into an alliance with Metternich and to their defeat in the last Swiss civil war of November 1847.¹⁰¹ Kopp came close to administering the coup-de-grace to Tell. Following his researches, a succession of leading Swiss historians endeavoured to keep the questions connected with Tell well out of the lime-light. He was eliminated from history textbooks and banned from the 1891 centennial celebrations of the birth of the Confederacy. But, on the other hand, his symbolic significance and his popularity proved such that scholarly opinion no longer mattered. When Hitler's Germany seemed to threaten Swiss independence, a leading Swiss historian, Karl Meyer, went to extraordinary length to argue with a mass of erudite conjectures that the Swiss Tell tradition

¹⁰⁰ Bergier, *Guillaume Tell* cit. 408f.

¹⁰¹ *Urkunden zur Geschichte der eidgenössischen Bünde*, ed. Johann Eutyck Kopp (Lucerne and Vienna 1835-51). Feller and Bonjour, *Geschichtsschreibung der Schweiz* cit. II 793-98.

was consistent with historical reality and owed nothing to the nordic myth.¹⁰² In the end it probably was the ruthless commercial exploitation of Tell symbols as much as the absence of national emergencies that induced some Swiss artists and writers to discover the lighter side of their national hero. A satirical sketch of the 1950s presents a gang of Uri school children happily hurling insults at the wretched Habsburg soldiers detailed to guard the hat on its pole. And, finally, it also was with Swiss school children in mind that in 1970 Max Frisch, a leading Swiss writer, wrote a sympathetic account of the tribulations endured in a strange, inhospitable country by that fat Habsburg official whose name perhaps was Gessler.¹⁰³ On the level of serious scholarly argument too, the myth is alive and well today. It is being kept alive not only by those Swiss historians who credit Tell with full-blooded historicity, but also in more innovative ways. A recent contribution allows that "the legend ... probably incorporates more mythical elements than real facts," only to argue that Tell's name is a leftover from an otherwise forgotten Celtic culture, and so is almost anything else to do with the origins of the Swiss Confederacy.¹⁰⁴

VI

Arminius

In Germany too the Renaissance period was marked by a valiant attempt to transform an individual character of the past into a loadstar of national identity. His name was Arminius (or Hermann); and if in the end he never expressed the essence of being German in the way that Tell represented the Swiss and Joan of Arc the French, it was not for any lack of dedication on the part of the Renaissance promoters.

¹⁰² Karl Meyer, *Der Freiheitskampf der Eidgenössischen Bundesgründer* (Frauenfeld 1941); *Quellenwerk* cit. III *Chroniken* I.xlv-xlvii.

¹⁰³ Max Frisch, *Wilhelm Tell für die Schule* (Frankfurt 1971). For the sketch of Heinrich Danioth see Stunzi et al, *Tell* cit. 309.

¹⁰⁴ Pierre Maugué, *Guillaume Tell et la tradition celtique. Le mythe et l'histoire* (Paris 1985) 120 and passim. See also Bergier, *Guillaume Tell* cit. 415, 446 for the grotesque theories proposed by Arnold C. Schärer, *Und es gab Tell doch* (Lucerne 1986).

The fact that Arminius' achievements lay some fifteen hundred years in the past rather than two hundred years as Tell's exploits or only decades as Joan's made little difference. The events, though remote, were presumed to be known as adequately and reliably as the actions of Joan — a far cry, indeed, from the awkward silence of the earliest Swiss sources with regard to Tell. What is more, the accounts of Arminius' deeds were found in some greatly admired authors of classical Antiquity. The sense of drama and the beauty of succinct expression were all there, inviting imitation. In short, if one wished to call forth a spirit of national resurgence and unity, Arminius was the perfect exemplar to recall.

The launching of Arminius was a direct result of the rediscovery of the historian Tacitus. To the end of the Renaissance period Tacitus was always accepted as sterling source of factual information. It was apparently not noticed that his aim was not exactly objectivity — he, the historian, has pointedly been called the only tragic poet in Roman literature.¹⁰⁵ His proneness to bias was first pointed out by his French translators in the seventeenth century.¹⁰⁶ From the time of the rediscovery of the *Germania*, first printed in a Venetian Tacitus edition in 1470, the Roman historian was bound to have even greater significance for his early German readers than he had had for his first Italian editors. As for Arminius, it was the Medicean edition of Tacitus (Rome 1515), the first to include *Annales* books 1-6, that introduced the German humanists to their potential national hero, all crisp and ready to be seized upon. Only a few features remained to be added from other sources such as Velleius Paterculus.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Alfred Kappelmacher — Mauriz Schuster, *Die Literatur der Römer bis zur Karolingerzeit* (Potsdam 1926-34) 336 (in *Handbuch der Literaturwissenschaft*, ed. Oskar Walzel); cf Richard Kuehnemund, *Arminius or the Rise of a National Symbol in Literature* (Chapel Hill, N.C. 1953) 1. By contrast, Hutten wrote emphatically of Tacitus: "*quo nemo syncerius scripserit historiam minusque affectibus tribuerit.*" See Ulrich von Hutten, *Arminius, dialogus* in: *Opera*, ed. E. Böcking (Leipzig 1859-61) IV 409-18, here 410f. Tacitus' objectivity has been defended even recently: see Luigi Quattrocchi, *Il mito di Arminio* (Naples 1979 —) I 20, 32.

¹⁰⁶ Else-Lilly Etter, *Tacitus in der Geistesgeschichte des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts* (Basel 1966) 172. For the rediscovery of Tacitus, see also Kenneth C. Schellhase, *Tacitus in Renaissance Political Thought* (Chicago 1976).

¹⁰⁷ German readers were particularly indebted to Beatus Rhenanus, who edited Tacitus (1519, 1533) and Velleius Paterculus (1520) for the Basel press of Johann Froben. The latter edition has a woodcut-framed title page, which shows Arminius and his "*Germani*" defeating the Romans. Varus lies slain and a Roman cuts out the tongue of a Roman next to a caption reading: "*Tandem, vipera, sibilare desiste.*" This frame was designed by Ambrosius Holbein probably for the Velleius, but Froben also used it for other works including the second edition of Erasmus' New Testament (1519); see Frank Hieronymus, *Oberrheinische Buchillustration 2*

Stripped of all its detail and its literary brilliance, Tacitus' story may be rendered as follows. Arminius, a Cheruscan of "royal blood," was at first closely associated with the Roman establishment. Later, however, he came to lead an insurrection against his former patrons. In 9 A.D., in the thick of the Teutoburg Forest, he succeeded in destroying three legions together with all their support troops and the commander, P. Quintilius Varus. Subsequently, when pitted against more capable Roman commanders and hampered by indiscipline among his own rank and file, Arminius lost more battles than he won. He died aged thirty-seven, defeated in his ambitions, not by the might of the Romans — Tacitus insisted on this point — , but by the intrigues of his own family. After the momentous Varus battle the Romans did not attempt to re-occupy the bulk of German territories, situated to the east of the Rhine. Thus Tacitus was justified in calling Arminius the "*liberator Germaniae*," but he also argued that afterwards Arminius' ambition to assume royal powers ran counter to the spirit of popular liberty.¹⁰⁸ On the other hand, as Tacitus saw it, Arminius made a heroic choice. His young wife and a son he had never seen were hostages in the hands of the Romans. But love of his dear ones never interfered with his determination to fight on. In the final analysis his victory was indeed unique; while other enemies had defeated Rome when her power was but fledgling, Arminius triumphed when she was in her prime. At a hundred years' distance from the events, Tacitus claimed, songs in praise of Arminius were still being sung in the wilderness of Germany.

In Tacitus' Roman perspective, the *liberator Germaniae* was also the *turbator Germaniae*, a troublemaker.¹⁰⁹ Although Tacitus never called him a traitor, in reality he may have been just that. It seems likely that within the framework of the Roman military organization he commanded a force of Cheruscan auxiliaries and began to plan his coup in view of the severe and persistent difficulties the Romans had in Pannonia where a large-scale national rebellion had broken out. Indeed, Tacitus' readers had good reason to assume that something of similar magnitude was subsequently happening in Germany. By

(Basel 1984) 246f., 432. Cassius Dio, who gives the fullest account of the Varus battle, was practically unknown to the early German humanists. In general see John F. D'Amico, *Theory and Practice in Renaissance Textual Criticism. Beatus Rhenanus Between Conjecture and History* (Berkeley 1988).

¹⁰⁸ Tacitus, *Annales* 2.88: "*regnum adfectans libertatem popularium adversam habuit.*"

¹⁰⁹ Tacitus, *Annales* 1.55.

contrast, modern scholars are inclined to reduce the scale of Arminius' operations.¹¹⁰ Tacitus certainly remained the great impresario when Arminius made his first appearances on the German stage. In comparison with his sense of drama and consummate style, the Renaissance appraisals of Arminius proved rather pale, even when presented in the familiar German idiom. Thus, in spite of Tacitus, popular awareness of Arminius' patriotic merits remained at first fairly limited. The labours of a few humanists were apparently not sufficient to change that. It is true that in the wake of the so-called *Germania* of Aeneas Sylvius (Pius II), written in 1458, and of the first edition of Tacitus' *Germania*, a powerful tradition of pride in the achievements of pre-Roman Germany had developed, but to the middle of the seventeenth century Arminius' place in this tradition remained a modest one.¹¹¹

Before the rediscovery of Tacitus, an erroneous assumption that Varus' defeat had taken place near Augsburg succeeded in generating some local interest. The battle also drew some attention from chroniclers and early humanists such as Conrad Celtis, Jakob Wimpfeling, Johannes Nauclerus, Heinrich Bebel and Franciscus Irenicus. Next, Arminius himself appeared on the scene and was shown some appreciation by Andreas Althamer, Johannes Carion and Johannes Aventinus. Heinrich Pantaleon in 1565 equated his name with the familiar German name of Hermann.¹¹² Only two sixteenth-century writings, however, were specifically focussed on Arminius. Their authors, Ulrich von Hutten and Georg Spalatinus,¹¹³ were affected by the ideas of German humanism and, even more so, by

¹¹⁰ Dietmar Kienast, *Augustus Princeps und Monarch* (Darmstadt 1982) 304-7.

¹¹¹ A different view is expressed by Schellhase, *Tacitus* cit. 12, 47f.

¹¹² For details see Schellhase, *Tacitus* cit. 47; Quattrocchi, *Il mito di Arminio* cit. I 39-43; Kuehnemund, *Arminius* cit. 19-24; Ludwig Krapf, *Germanenmythos und Reichsideologie. Frühhumanistische Rezeptionsweisen der taciteischen "Germania"* (Tübingen 1979); Pantaleon, *Prosopographia* cit. I 95f.

¹¹³ Hutten actually dealt repeatedly with this topic in the period from 1515 to c. 1520. In his panegyric on Archbishop Albert of Mainz he called Arminius the "Brutus Germanus." In a widely circulated letter to the Elector Frederick of Saxony (11 September 1520), he claimed that the Saxons were the true descendants of the Cherusicans and spoke of Arminius as "the best and mightiest emperor to date." The dialogue *Arminius*, finally, was composed at about the same time and published posthumously in 1529. See Hutten, *Opera* cit. I 390, III 378, IV 409-18. Spalatinus' short monograph, the first treatment of the topic in German, was published at Wittenberg in 1535. I have consulted a Latin translation by Simon Schard in his huge *Historicum opus* (Basel [1574]) I 508-18 (where it is, typically, preceded by Hutten's dialogue). Spalatinus offers an objective and well-organized compilation of the pertinent classical sources with the exception of Cassius Dio.

those of Luther's Reformation. Since the Italian humanists habitually took pride in presenting themselves as the direct descendants of the glorious Romans, their German counterparts were delighted to find in Tacitus' *liberator Germaniae* an ancestor who would help them match the Italian pretensions. It is doubtful, of course, how much Cheruscan blood might have pulsed in the veins of any sixteenth-century German. But unlike the French humanists,¹¹⁴ neither the Germans, nor for that matter the Italians, were much troubled by the thought that the purity of their lineage was open to question. Rather it was their passionate criticism of the Roman papacy that prompted these German humanists to find great relevance in the example of the old Cheruscan. He had rid the fatherland of the Roman legions, and just so his offspring would rid Germany of the jackals of the Roman pope. Accordingly Hutten presented Varus as the perfect prototype of the Roman jackal, feeble-minded, blindly assuming that the Germans were unreasoning brutes and eager to milk them as he had previously milked the Syrians in the years of his legateship in their province. Right now, so we hear Hutten musing, what might Arminius, the "*liberator noster*," think of his offspring, seeing the Germans subservient to "soft priests and effeminate pontiffs?"¹¹⁵ Writing in Hutten's wake, Spalatinus could refrain from drawing any parallels to the contemporary situation. His compilation of the source texts would speak for itself because the compiler was universally known as friend and translator of Luther and Melanchthon.

Hutten's dialogue is set in Hades. Minos, the ruler over the dead, apparently is in the habit of ranking his subjects. Among the military commanders he has given the top spots to Alexander the Great, Scipio Africanus¹¹⁶ and Hannibal. Arminius believes that Minos has treated him unfairly and complains. Tacitus is summoned as a witness; he recites the conclusive judgement of Arminius given in *Annales* 2.88. Arminius then presents his case and answers some objections proffered — without enthusiasm, it seems — by his three rivals. In the end Minos must revise his judgement and concede the first place to the Cheruscan. Without departing too far from Tacitus' account, Hutten rids his hero of all controversial traits. If Tacitus was tendentious,

¹¹⁴ See below pp. 195-97.

¹¹⁵ Hutten, *Opera* cit. I 390, IV 417.

¹¹⁶ It seems that, like Petrarch, Hutten preferred the republican Scipio to Dante's griffon-eyed Caesar. Perhaps this is an indication that the dialogue dates from Hutten's final period of disenchantment with imperial policy.

Hutten is considerably more so. When he claims that the Cheruscan's motives were entirely unselfish and that he succeeded in his bid to unite Germany, Hutten completely reverses some of Tacitus' statements. He also blames the Romans for most of the trouble Arminius had with his own side. Adgandestrius, the leader of the Chatti, who attempted to poison Arminius, is made out to be a Roman agent, whereas, according to Tacitus the Romans had contemptuously turned down his overtures. What Tacitus had to say about rivalries and intrigues among the German tribal leadership is largely ignored in Hutten's dialogue. In short, Tacitus' fascination with a complex individual and his inner conflicts is lost to a simplification of, indeed, mythical proportions. Vile Roman stands against noble German, and a German by virtue of his very nature will not play second fiddle to any one.

The dialogue *Arminius* is definitely not Hutten's best literary production. Unlike most of his other dialogues, it was not printed in a vernacular version until much later,¹¹⁷ and before the middle of the seventeenth century even intellectual circles seem to have taken little notice of it. The contrast between the fortunes of a Joan of Arc or a Tell and those of Arminius is unmistakable. If Arminius was in trouble, the reason no doubt was that Hutten single-handedly tried to conjure up a popular tradition that had not so far existed.¹¹⁸ By contrast, the French maid and the Swiss marksman were popular heroes before any author took up his pen in their praise. The writers merely assisted the process by which they became national symbols. By contrast, Arminius lacked grass roots appeal. The credentials of a national liberation hero that Hutten and a handful of humanists had bestowed on Arminius went unnoticed outside some academic circles, at least until the time of the Thirty Years' War. The sense of impotence and misery created by that fratricidal struggle helped to draw renewed attention to Arminius, but what then emerged was a character of literary fiction rather than historical myth. This new trend culminated with the baroque writer Daniel Casper von Lohenstein and

¹¹⁷ The first ed. of Hutten and Spalatinus to include a German transl. along with the Latin texts was edited by Friedrich Fröhlich (Vienna 1815).

¹¹⁸ It is true that since the nineteenth century the existence of an enduring popular tradition has repeatedly been argued. The scholars who are doing so take their cue from Tacitus' reference to folk ballads in praise of Arminius. They identify the latter with the Nibelungen saga and Arminius himself with the mythical Siegfried. Their evidence, however, does not convince. See Graus, *Lebendige Vergangenheit* cit. 248; Kuehnemund, *Arminius* cit. xi, 112f. and *passim*.

his diluvial novel, *Grossmüthiger Feldherr Arminius oder Hermann ...* (even the title runs on for another ten lines), published in 1689-90. It is an opus of no less than 1.670.000 words, presenting interwoven strands of adventure in the fashion of the Arthur or Roland epical cycles.¹¹⁹

The number of literary appraisals of Arminius kept growing throughout the eighteenth century, but as long as Hutten's arch-patriotic stance was prudently discontinued, the results were unexciting. A new, more promising phase of acceptance began only when the old Cheruscan returned to the political stage. In the years of widespread opposition, first to the new Napoleonic order and then to the tangle of their own Restoration governments, the German nation was again inspired by the pristine *liberator Germaniae*. A fine play by Heinrich von Kleist can serve to illustrate the heart-felt need for a national revival as well as the powerful forces that tried to block its way. Written in 1808 as a protest against French domination and strife among the German princes, it was not printed until 1821 and had to wait even longer for the first stage productions. After two isolated performances in 1839, it finally gained favour from 1860 onwards — at a time when rousing appeals to German unity had become compatible with the political goals of the Prussian government.¹²⁰ While both historians and fictional writers were pursuing the Cheruscan with growing vigour, a grand monument in his honour was to be erected in the Teutoburg Forest. But again Arminius was in trouble. The project was launched in 1819; but then decades were spent in fruitless efforts to raise the required funds by public subscription.¹²¹ Also, the motivation shifted; in the years between the 1848 Revolution and the forging of the new Reich in 1871, the

¹¹⁹ Quattrocchi, *Il mito di Arminio* cit. I 68ff., 90ff. (a summary of the action of Lohenstein's novel); Kuehnemund, *Arminius* cit. xi-xii, 26-48.

¹²⁰ Kleist allows his play *Die Hermannsschlacht* to end with a call for the merciless destruction of all Romans (i.e. French) on German soil. Just before that, a remarkably Machiavellian Hermann (representing Prussia) and the Swabian king Marbod (representing Austria) politely vie in deferring to each other, but finally it is Hermann who is proposed as the all-German king. See Kuehnemund, *Arminius* cit. 86-95, and Graus, *Lebendige Vergangenheit* cit. 249-54.; both authors also analyze other works written in the wake of Kleist.

¹²¹ A naughty student song by J.V. von Scheffel (1826-86) made fun of the embarrassing situation: "Als die Römer frech geworden/ .../ Und zu Ehren der Geschichten/ Thät ein Denkmal man errichten./ Schon steht das Piedestal,/ Doch wer die Statue bezahlt/ Weiss nur Gott im Himmel." See Graus, *Lebendige Vergangenheit* cit. 250; Wilhelm Uhl, *Das Portrait des Arminius* (Königsberg 1898) 107. This latter study by a promising *Privatdozent* shows how an amused look at the patriotic Arminius cult was becoming socially acceptable.

Cheruscan became a symbol of German unification rather than liberation, and in this change of roles he lost his historical credibility. Not until 1875 was the ponderous monument completed. The sword, weighing 1100 kilos, in Arminius' raised right hand was donated by the Krupp armament concern.¹²² The Cheruscan chief fared better in the Valhalla temple of all-German fame. While he had to share the light of glory with over a hundred other national heroes, he outshone them all.¹²³ The Valhalla, however, was built by a single prince, and the majority of those honoured were also princes. Even the inauguration, on 18 October 1842 was graced primarily by an assemblage of invited princes, with scant participation on the part of the general public.¹²⁴ Later on, however, in 1909 the nineteenth centenary of Arminius' great victory was celebrated everywhere with fanfare. Finally, after 1933, Arminius was sometimes promoted from symbolic godfather of the new German Empire to forerunner of Adolf Hitler.¹²⁵ But since on the whole the Nazi leadership did not share Mussolini's passion for the grandeur of the national past, Arminius' role in the Third Reich, again, remained a modest one.

The principal reason for Arminius' unconvincing performance as a national symbol has been indicated earlier. Unlike Joan of Arc and William Tell he did not benefit from the spontaneous emergence of a popular tradition that preceded the ministrations of writing intellectuals and, indeed, set it in motion. One can also make out complementary obstacles that impeded the triumphant progress of the Cheruscan. One was that he had tough rivals; the most formidable among them were

¹²² Hermann Kesting, *Der Befreier Arminius in Lichte der geschichtlichen Quellen und der wissenschaftlichen Forschung*, with an appendix: *Ernst von Bandel und die Errichtung des Hermannsdenkmals*, 5th ed. (Detmold 1962). The book continues the tradition of saber-ratting nationalism. Helmut Scharf, *Kleine Kunstgeschichte des deutschen Denkmals* (Darmstadt 1984) 184, 197 and plate 138.

¹²³ On the Valhalla see below pp. 388-90. Germania in person presides on one of two external frieze reliefs. Arminius was chosen as her counterpart on the other frieze; he is surrounded by associates including Varus. For a maverick Arminius with the features of Emperor William I, see below p. 392.

¹²⁴ Ruprecht Stolz, *Die Walhalla. Ein Beitrag zum Denkmalsgedanken im 19. Jahrhundert* (Cologne 1977) 85, 349. The book is a Cologne Dr. phil. dissertation.

¹²⁵ See e.g. Willy Krogmann, *Das Arminiusmotiv in der deutschen Dichtung* (Weimar 1933) 20: "The unification [!] of the Germanic tribes under Arminius" is a theme that will help the German people to appreciate "the powerful experience of the most recent past, which sinks in ever more deeply and rallies around Adolf Hitler, the Führer, who has welded together the German nation, pulling it back from the chasm of perdition." Quoted by Graus, *Lebendige Vergangenheit* cit, 251.

probably Siegfried and, especially, Barbarossa.¹²⁶ In the first half of the sixteenth century, just when Hutten prepared to break a lance for Arminius, the myth of Barbarossa was flourishing. But even then the Cheruscan had other rivals too — and he had them exactly in his promising role of champion against the popish tyranny. There are two protestant songs dating from the time of Charles V's victory over the Lutherans in the Schmalkaldic War, 1546-47. One was to be sung to the tune of a powerful hymn by Luther that was likewise inspired by the defeat of his correlative. It cited Arminius together with the tenth-century Emperor Otto III, who moved to Rome and kept a succession of popes under his thumb. The other, composed when the war was still undecided, described a dream in which the author was being visited by Ariovistus, Hermannus (Arminius), Barbarossa and Georg von Frundsberg, the *Landsknecht* leader in the Sack of Rome, 1527, all urging firm resistance to the ruthless emperor allied to a perfidious pope.¹²⁷

Another complementary obstacle was the vexing questions concerning Arminius' character. It is true that Tell too was not immune against the charge that his killing of Gessler was an act of personal vendetta, but, in any event, the incident was peripheral. One could conveniently ignore Gessler's murder, as some chroniclers did, without jeopardizing Tell's role in the independence struggle. Or one could attempt to justify the act, as Schiller had done. Arminius' case was more troublesome. Hutten already had to defend his hero against the charge (voiced in the dialogue by Scipio) that he had perfidiously betrayed the Romans who trusted him. Another problem for Arminius' glorifiers was that Tacitus had attributed his failure to unite the

¹²⁶ On Barbarossa see above pp. 138-45, and for Siegfried cf. above n. 118. Satirical parallels between Barbarossa in the Kyffhäuser and Arminius, whose monument is in need of funding, can also be found in Heinrich Heine's *Deutschland. Ein Wintermärchen* (1844) chs. XI and XIV.

¹²⁷ Rochus von Liliencron, *Die historischen Volkslieder der Deutschen vom 13. bis zum 16. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig 1865-69) IV 460-62, 570. In the first song, to the tune of "Ein feste Burg...", (Luther, *Werke*, Weimar, 35:455-57, 467f.), a Saxon maid prays for deliverance from the violence of the Spanish soldiers. The end of this song is worth quoting: "Drum gib uns, Herr, den dritten Held, / der Dir alleine wolgefelt. / Ach, Herr, ich mein einen Jehu. / Doch sich Du selber auch mit zu, / dass doch mein liebes Vaterland / erlöst wird auss der Spanier Hand. / Lass uns bleiben bei Deinem Wort; / steyer des Bapsts und Spanier Mord." The other song, by Johannes Schradin, is reminiscent of the dream appearances of Frederick Barbarossa (see above p. 142) and especially of a similar political *Somnium*, in which Charlemagne, Otto I and Barbarossa appear before the assembled diet of the German princes. It was written in 1495 by a Magdeburg councillor, Hans Lupus von Hermansgrün; see Peuckert, *Die grosse Wende* cit. I 227-34.

German tribes in part at least to his greed for personal power. Again it was Hutten who first presented the convenient solution — which was to ignore what Tacitus had said. But this amounted to a crass distortion of the facts as they were known. If thus there are reasons to explain why Arminius never became a national symbol in the way of Joan of Arc and Tell, it should not be overlooked that his story too could satisfy the essential requirements of historical myth. He was made to serve diverse ideological causes and his role as *liberator Germaniae* was transferable to others. While the Renaissance configurations of Arminius, and also of Joan of Arc and Tell, all attest to the growth of national sentiment, even Arminius, and more so the other two, also point to a general indulgence for imagination, which tempered that sentiment and usually prevented it from producing such crude forms of nationalism as will be encountered in the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER FIVE

AD FONTES : RENAISSANCE GENEALOGY AND THE MYTH OF THE GOLDEN AGE

I

The Descent from Troy

In the preceding chapter we have found three developments to be characteristic of the Renaissance period. Secular heroes from both the remote and the recent past had joined — not replaced — the Christian saints as loadstars of society. Secondly, the new paradigms tended to be draped in the colours of their various national traditions; Arminius, for example, was seen as a German to boot. Finally, Joan of Arc and William Tell succeeded where Arminius did not. Not only did they acquire the status of national symbols, enduring well beyond the sixteenth century, they also became endowed with a fame that transcended the national borders. They acquired mythical properties apt to inspire people of all races. Initially, however, their mythic significance owed a great deal to a popular, orally transmitted tradition. The two characteristics mentioned in the first place, secularism and patriotic sentiment, also applied to Renaissance genealogy. The descent, pretended or real, from illustrious ancestors was seen to promise fame and popularity. It also invited the visual representation of such ancestors.

Genealogy in the Renaissance period is a vast field for study. To limit consideration to forebears placed on a family tree will not do justice to the spirit of the age. Inheritance through the mind was as important as inheritance through the blood. Again, we shall have to be content with some few examples chosen more or less at random. We have noticed how from the beginning of the fourteenth century a historical consciousness developed among the educated classes and, as education broadened, became more sophisticated. As people grew accustomed to comparing and contrasting the present with the past, and also to different epochs of the past with one another, thinking in terms of *historia* and *fabula* also became more differentiated. While this growing sense of discrimination does apply to the field of

genealogy, it must be emphasized, again, that neither Renaissance humanism nor the Reformation effected anything like a clean breach with medieval traditions. The desire to identify the origins of a family, a city, a profession or a people ultimately flows from the elementary human need to find one's roots, that is, to unravel the mysteries of the self. In Antiquity the Greeks and also the Jews had eagerly inquired after such origins.¹ In the Middle Ages the groundwork was laid for the web of genealogical myths that was to spread in the Renaissance period until it enveloped almost every facet of the social fabric.

That the kings of France, for instance, were descended from Troy was claimed already in Merovingian times. As far as we know, the first to do so was Fredegar in his chronicle compiled in about 658-60. According to Fredegar, the abduction of Helen was carried out by King Priam personally — Paris is not mentioned — and led to the fall of Troy and the settlement of Trojan refugees in northern Europe. The Franks were of Trojan stock and took their name from King Francio, who began to build a new Troy near the river Rhine.² The story was taken up by other Latin chroniclers; in the thirteenth century it was incorporated in the *Grandes Chroniques de France*, and in this vernacular form it gained broad popular acceptance.³ Fredegar was not content, however, with tracing the descent of the Franks back to Francio and Priam. The great success of his genealogical combination is ultimately due to the fact that it was part of an even more comprehensive historical construction. Priam himself was descended from Shem, the first son of Noah.⁴ The theory of the French kings' Trojan ancestry was thus safely anchored to the unquestionable truth of the Bible. A premise was established that would eventually lead a Renaissance writer to claim a spot in Paradise for one of the Trojan forebears of his king — a privilege more commonly reserved to the Old Testament ones. In 1516 there appeared in print a curious *Epistre*

¹ See above pp. 25, 32.

² Fredegar 2.4, 3.2.9; ed. Bruno Krusch in MGH, *Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum* II (Hannover 1888) 45, 93f.; see also Kusternig in the introduction to his edition cit. 12.

³ *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, ed. (Alexis-)Paulin Paris (Paris 1836-38) I. See Philippe Ariès, *Le temps de l'histoire*, new ed. (Paris 1986) 123-31; Colette Beaune, *Naissance de la nation française* (Paris 1985) 20 and passim. At the eve of the Renaissance it was Guido de Columnis' *Historia destructionis Troiae* (completed in 1287) that acquainted the European intelligentsia with the authentic history of Francus, who was here presented as a companion of Aeneas; see Guido de Columnis, *Historia destructionis Troiae* 2, ed. N.E. Griffin (Cambridge, Mass. 1936) 11f.

⁴ Fredegar 1.5, ed. Krusch cit. 21.

du Roy à Hector de Troye, written in the name of Louis XII. The real author was Jean Lemaire de Belges (c.1473-c.1525), historiographer to Louis' queen, Anne of Brittany. The *Epistre* was composed in 1511, at the time of the Holy League that pitted Pope Julius II and his allies against France. As far as Lemaire was concerned, not only was Prince Hector historical, he was an ancestor of the kings of France in the direct line and, indeed, was now in heaven. How could it be otherwise? Compare him to the Emperor Trajan, who had lived after Christ and even persecuted many Christians. It was common knowledge that Trajan had been saved through the prayers of a sainted pope; so how could Hector be damned, who had lived a blameless life long before the Christian era? Would that there still were such a pope, who was content with his mitre, without disguising himself (as Julius II did by donning a helmet).⁵

The royal historiographer was gifted with remarkable imagination; in his *Illustrations de Gaule et singularitez de Troye* (1509-13) he emerges as the epigonic spokesman for a society firmly opposed to any clear distinction between chivalresque romance and factual history. The contrast with Boccaccio⁶ could hardly be greater. It is true that Lemaire may have spoken tongue in cheek when he argued for Hector's admission to Paradise, but he was serious about Hector's historicity. His concept of universal history rested on firm foundations of humanistic scholarship. Just because the base was solid, he gave himself licence to guide the heroes he believed to be historical into a jungle of chivalric and amorous adventures of his own free invention. His fanciful tales were grounded upon his belief in universal history and genealogy, just as the medieval legends of the saints were grounded upon faith, not upon scepticism. Moreover, if the French could trace back their descent to Priam and Noah, so could everybody else. The list grew and grew. Inspired chiefly by the spurious text of Berossus,⁷ Jean Lemaire found eponymous descendants of Noah recorded all over the map of Europe, in the names of regions, cities, rivers and lakes — enough to make part of his work resemble a

⁵ Jean Lemaire de Belges, *Oeuvres*, ed. J. Stecher (Louvain 1882-91) III 68-86. For Lemaire, see Claude-Gilbert Dubois, *Celtes et Gaulois au XVI^e siècle. Le développement littéraire d'un mythe nationaliste* (Paris 1972) 29-39. For the Trajan's salvation through the prayers of Pope Gregory I, see above pp. 74-78. See also Appendix I for other pagan company that awaited King Francis I in Heaven.

⁶ See above pp. 146f., 151-53.

⁷ See below p. 194.

manual of geography.⁸ Throughout the Middle Ages the Trojans and their Roman offspring, not the Greeks, had been the favourite lineage through which to reach back to the postdiluvian beginnings of the human races. Even the grim Turks were, following the first and tenuous suggestions in Fredegar,⁹ commonly and logically traced back to Troy and thus became the brethren of the Franks and other European peoples. Not until Jean Lemaire did this view come in for serious revision. Heartened by Pseudo-Berosus, he boldly argued that the Turks were not Trojans, but usurpers and needed to be subdued by the joint efforts of the many true descendants of Troy in Europe.¹⁰

From Antiquity the same popular hero — or were there several heroes bearing the same name? — could often be found at the roots of the most diverse families and cities. As late as the fourteenth century spurious genealogies tended to amplify this confusion and thus to hamper a differentiated perception of the past. By contrast, in the sixteenth century — paradoxically — this same kind of spurious genealogy helped to sharpen the historical consciousness. As an example of the earlier state of affairs one might mention Jean d'Outremeuse (1338-1400). What he had read about Romulus and Remus left him utterly bewildered. There were two pairs of twins, he finally concluded, the Latin pair and another in Gaul. Moreover, one pair somehow got transformed into the other. What mattered, though, was that Remus founded the city of Reims before Romulus founded Rome. Unfortunately Remus was slain after he had been outlawed by his brother.¹¹ In like fashion, Antenor, whom the Greek conquerors of Troy had suffered to escape, appeared in many places. As the founder of Padua he became the object of a veritable cult. In 1274 a late Roman sarcophagus of a type that is now known to be fairly common was discovered and at once assigned to Antenor. It was placed under a tabernacle in a central square of the city, where the

⁸ Lemaire, *Les Illustrations de Gaule* 1.3-20 in *Oeuvres* cit. I 25-123. As late as the beginning of the seventeenth century, Lemaire's efforts were resumed in Richard Lynche's *Historical Treatise of the Travels of Noah into Europe* (London 1601), a compilation from Pseudo-Berosus and other sources.

⁹ Fredegar 2.28, 3.2.

¹⁰ Lemaire, *Les Illustrations* in *Oeuvres* cit. II 257, 473f.; see also his *Epistre du Roy*, cited above n. 5. Cf. Denys Hay, *Europe. The Emergence of an Idea* (Edinburgh 1957) 48, 50, 84f., 109.

¹¹ Jean Des Preis called d'Outremeuse, *Ly Myreur des histours* cit. I.50-56, cf. 590-92.

monument can still be admired.¹² Eventually people would learn better to distinguish the different faces of the past, and educated people would learn faster than simple folk. When the Zurich Dominican Felix Fabri (d. 1502) visited Venice en route to his second visit to the Holy Land (1483), he admired in the church of San Zanipolo (Sts. John and Paul) the funeral monuments of doges, decorated with the effigies of saints as well as great pagans. On the recently completed tomb of Doge Pietro Mocenigo, Fabri recognized, among other statues, a Hercules and a Venus, but noted that the populace took them for Samson and the Magdalen and venerated them accordingly.¹³

At the turn of the sixteenth century, a good indication of the growth of historical consciousness is provided by two famous forgeries of historical sources. Carefully crafted to fill the annoying gaps between the Greek and Old Testament myths on the one hand, and the beginnings of proper historical records on the other, the two forgeries were sophisticated enough to be taken seriously even by many scholars, although neither met with universal acceptance. One of the forgers was the Dominican Johannes Annius of Viterbo (c.1432-1502). For the last three years of his life he held the prestigious office of the *Magister Sacri Palatii*, that is, the pope's personal theologian. In 1498 he published his *Antiquitates*,¹⁴ a collection of mysteriously recovered texts by ancient historians, whose work had been known so far only from some excerpts and references found in the writings of others. To these exciting discoveries Annius added his own scholarly commentaries. Two of his newly discovered sources had particular

¹² Hugo Buchthal, *Historia Troiana. Studies in the History of Mediaeval Secular Illustration* (London and Leiden 1971) 59.

¹³ Felix Fabri, *Evagatorium* ed. K.D. Hassler (Stuttgart 1843-49) III 425; cf. Paul Joachimsen, *Geschichtsauffassung und Geschichtsschreibung in Deutschland unter dem Einfluss des Humanismus* (Leipzig 1910) 49.

¹⁴ Johannes Annius (Nanni), *Antiquitatum variarum volumina XVII* (Rome 1498). Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the book was circulated in a number of reprints, an Italian translation and an English paraphrase; see E.N. Tigerstedt, "Ioannes Annius and the *Graecia mendax*" in *Classical, Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies in Honor of Berthold Louis Ullman* (Rome 1964) II 293-310, also for the following. Anthony Grafton, *Defenders of the Text. The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1450-1800* (Cambridge, Mass. 1991) 76-103. Annio da Viterbo. *Documenti e ricerche*, ed. Giovanni Baffioni (Rome 1981). Roland Crahay, "Réflexions sur le faux historique: le cas d'Annus de Viterbe" in: *Académie royale de Belgique, Bulletin de la classe des lettres et des sciences morales et politiques* 5th series, 69 (1983) 241-67. Walter Stephen, *Giants in Those Days* (Lincoln, Nebraska 1989) 101ff.

significance for the genealogy of Christ and the descent of many European nations. These were the histories of Berossus the Babylonian and Manetho the Egyptian, both of them learned priests, who had written in the third century B.C. To modern critics Annius' forgery may not seem all that subtle. We simply know there was never an ancient source claiming that Noah had sailed to Italy. Moreover, even though Annius' facts are arranged to tally with the genuine excerpts from Berossus and Manetho preserved in Flavius Josephus and Strabo, the style does not. In Annius' own time, however, his inventions were eagerly received as revelations. Not only were they found to agree well with some recently rediscovered pages in Tacitus and Strabo, they were also impressively compatible with one another — which in hindsight is no longer surprising, since all were the products of the same ingenious brain. Annius was proudly partial to his native city. Viterbo, so his fictitious texts announced, was one of the oldest cities of the world, indeed was founded by none other than Janus-Noah. Again this claim need not have given pause to the Dominican's contemporaries since, largely thanks to him, they were growing accustomed to the incredible energy with which the patriarch had been founding cities here and there and everywhere.¹⁵ On the other hand, Annius often showed spiteful contempt for the Greeks, who were traditionally banned from the genealogical Broadway that led from Noah via Troy towards the dynasties and cities of Renaissance Europe. He must have believed that he was serving a pious cause with his fabrications. His newly 'discovered' texts corroborated the truth of Genesis and helped to put the old concept of universal history beginning with Creation on solid (pseudo)-scholarly foundations.

Another influential forger was Johannes Trithemius (1462-1516), for some twenty-three years the Benedictine abbot of Sponheim and a prolific author. To flesh out his historical constructions, Trithemius invented the medieval chroniclers Meginfrid and Hunibald. Hunibald, in particular, who was presented as a contemporary of King Clovis (d. 511), became the principal authority, on which the abbot of Sponheim based his genealogies. In 1508 he first claimed to have perused Hunibald's chronicle. Afterwards he relied time and again on this unique source of information, which in the meantime had mysteriously

¹⁵ Don Cameron Allen, *The Legend of Noah. Renaissance Rationalism in Art, Science and Letters* (Urbana, Ill. 1949) 113ff.

disappeared.¹⁶ From the beginning the claims of both Annius and Trithemius met with some scattered scepticism, but the issue was never resolved during the Renaissance, and most readers felt free to assume that they had tested with a critical mind what their hearts told them to believe.¹⁷ There was, nevertheless, a debate over the authenticity of these texts. As it grew, it was bound to assist the emergence of historicism. Even those who defended the forgeries were challenged, like the forgers themselves, to ponder the compatibility of different sources and the consistency of chronological sequences.

II

Nascent Critique of Fabulous Mythologies

In France, as elsewhere in Europe, the impact of Annius and Trithemius was a powerful one. Of the many writers concerned with the genealogy of the French kings, some were inspired merely by their sense of loyalty to the medieval tradition and their own gracious monarchs. Such was the case of Nicole Gilles, Guillaume du Bellay and Robert Céneau.¹⁸ Others, like Pierre de Ronsard in his *Franciade* (1572), believed that patriotic poetry need not be concerned with historical documentation. But many authors seriously wished to employ scholarship as the handmaid of their patriotic enthusiasm. Jean Lemaire de Belges set great store not only by Annius, but also by Dares Phrygius and Dictys Cretensis, alleged participants in the Trojan war, whose reports had been fabricated in late Antiquity. Jean

¹⁶ Klaus Arnold, *Johannes Trithemius (1462-1516)* (Würzburg 1971) 167-79. Joachimsen, *Geschichtsauffassung* cit. 54ff. Borchardt, *German Antiquity in Renaissance Myth* cit. 96ff.

¹⁷ In his *Histoire universelle* (Paris 1621), Jacques de Charron inserted an *Apologie pour la defense de Berose, Manethon, Hunibalde et autres semblables auteurs*, in which he listed many preceding supporters as well as critics of the controversial texts. Why spurious genealogies were not viewed more critically is investigated by Roberto Bizzocchi, "Culture généalogique dans l'Italie du seizième siècle" *Annales* 46 (1991) 789-805.

¹⁸ Nicole Gilles, *Les très élégantes, très véridiques et copieuses annales* (Paris 1525), first published in 1492. Guillaume du Bellay, *Epitome de l'antiquité des Gaules et de France* (Paris 1556), posthumously published. Robert Céneau (Coenalis), *Gallica historia* (Paris 1557). See Maria Klippel, *Die Darstellung der Fränkischen Trojanersage in Geschichtsschreibung und Dichtung vom Mittelalter bis zur Renaissance in Frankreich* (Marburg 1936), a dissertation for Dr. phil.; Dubois, *Celtes et Gaulois au XVIe siècle* cit. 41-47.

Bouchet, in his *Anciennes et modernes généalogies des roys de France* (1527), acknowledged his considerable debt to Trithemius and Lemaire, “deux grands historiographes modernes.”¹⁹ Guillaume Postel, in his *Histoire memorable* (1552), asserted his trust in (Pseudo)-Berossus, who had written independently of Moses, as was clear from some differences in their accounts. While they differed, they did, however, not contradict each other. On the contrary, Postel found that the basic parallels in the Pentateuch confirmed the reliability of the Babylonian priest. As Postel saw it, the Gallic nation was descended from Noah and, unlike Noah’s other offspring, was from the beginning destined to rule the world. It had lived up to that destiny long before its own prince Charlemagne became the first legitimate emperor. To neglect those crucial points, as Paolo Emilio and Johannes Carion had done, was to demonstrate the lack of piety typical of Italians and the jealousy typical of Germans.²⁰ Paolo Emilio (d.1529) had in fact begun his history with the authentic Frankish kings of the fifth century. The Trojan descent by way of one Pharamund was mentioned merely in the opening lines as a hypothesis that apparently did not deserve further discussion. This unusual opening was followed immediately by the startling claim that in Cicero’s time the Franks were known to be a German tribe. Paolo Emilio was misinterpreting what Cicero had written,²¹ and so it was left to the Alsatian Beatus Rhenanus (1485-1547) to assert on better evidence that the Franks came from the shores of the North Sea. Scornful of Annius, Trithemius and their likes, he generally refused to deal with the origins of each people — classical writers had done this authoritatively — but he made an exception for the Franks; here a full treatment was needed in view of the abundance of scholarly

¹⁹ Aristide Joly, *Benoît de Sainte-More et le Roman de Troie ou les métamorphoses d’Homère et de l’épopée gréco-latine au Moyen-Age* (Paris 1870-71) I 583f.

²⁰ Guillaume Postel, *L’Histoire memorable des expéditions depuis le deluge faictes par les Gaulois ou François* (Paris 1552); this includes an “Apologie de la France contre les malevoles escripvains...” 8r.-9r., 58v.-60v., 66v.-70r. Cf. Joly, *Benoît de Sainte-More* cit. I 590-95; William J. Bouwsma, *Concordia Mundi: The Career and Thought of Guillaume Postel (1510-1581)* (Cambridge, Mass. 1957) 46, 220, 256-59 and passim; Dubois, *Celtés et Gaulois au XVI^e siècle* cit. 54-84, 135-75.

²¹ Paolo Emilio, *De rebus gestis Francorum*, first ed. (Paris c.1516/17); cf. George Huppert, *The Idea of Perfect History. Historical Erudition and Historical Philosophy in Renaissance France* (Urbana, Ill. 1970) 76-87, also for the following.

fictions and their exploitation by the French for political ends.²² Beatus Rhenanus and the other German scholars who agreed with him could not be discarded easily. In his *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem* (preface dated 1566), Jean Bodin willingly accepted their findings with regard to the Franks. He argued that the ancient Germans must be seen in light of the glowing tribute Tacitus had paid them. To be descended of them was nothing to be ashamed of — all the more so, as the Germans themselves had sprung from the Gauls, and not vice versa. The Gauls, in turn, were seen by Bodin, as by Postel, to perform a world-wide civilizing role. They hailed from either the Greeks or the Trojans, while ultimately everybody was descended from Noah and the Chaldaeans, who happened to live in the region where the ark had touched ground.²³ In the wake of Beatus Rhenanus, two other works of distinguished scholarship might have settled the matter once and for all in favour of such sources as are still considered authoritative. In his *Recherches de la France* (1560), Etienne Pasquier laughed about the international brigades descended from Troy “comme si de là fust sortie une pépinière de chevaliers,” and upbraided the historians who were willing to repeat such fables, so as to curry favour with their nations.²⁴ François Hotman’s *Francogallia* (1573) simply conferred the title of poet to all who delighted in the Trojan fables. As an example he mentioned Guillaume du Bellay’s *Epitome*, which he compared to chivalresque romances such the *Amadis de Gaule*.²⁵ But the demise of the Trojan legend had not yet come. It still showed plenty of vigour in the seventeenth century,²⁶ when scientific interest for Noah, his ark and his progeny reached a climax. The ground was to shift somewhat, but the battle continued.

With some insular idiosyncracies the French experience was repeated in England. In the first place, there was a medieval tradition

²² Beatus Rhenanus, *Rerum Germanicarum libri tres* (Basel 1531) 29: cf. Joachimsen, *Geschichtsauffassung* cit. 133-39. For French political claims based on the Trojan descent, e.g. to territories in Alsace, see Klippel, *Die Darstellung der fränkischen Trojanersage* cit. 50f.

²³ For the *Methodus* see the calamitous edition, with French translation, by Pierre Mesnard in *Oeuvres philosophiques de Jean Bodin* (Paris 1951) 241-49. Cf. the English translation by Beatrice Reynolds (New York 1969) 334-50.

²⁴ Etienne Pasquier, *Les Recherches de la France ... augmentées en ceste dernière édition de trois livres* (Paris 1621) 37f.

²⁵ François Hotman, *Francogallia*, ed. Ralph E. Giesey, English tr. by J.M.H. Salmon (Cambridge 1972) 196-98.

²⁶ Huppert, *The Idea of Perfect History* cit. 84-87; however, the view expressed here on François de Mézeray is open to questioning.

reaching back to Geoffrey of Monmouth. His fanciful *Historia regum Britanniae* (c.1135) began with Brutus, the great-grandson of Aeneas, who destroyed a race of giants named Gog — the insular version of the marauders encountered elsewhere²⁷ — to build the New Troy on the Thames and bequeath his name to the British people. On his way down to the history of Roman Britain, Geoffrey found space for the legendary King Lear or Leir, the founder of Leicester, and the two heartless daughters who between them divided his realm. Above all, Geoffrey related the exploits of King Arthur and the magician Merlin, who transported Stonehenge from Ireland to its present site. In the sixteenth century, the national lineage could be traced back even farther, namely to Japheth and Noah. This was largely due to Annius of Viterbo and to Richard White of Basingstoke (1539-1611), who combined Annius with Geoffrey. A peculiarly English embroidery of the conventional texture was the rediscovery of the Druids, which brought about legends as charming as they were enduring. An Italian expatriate, Polidoro Virgilio (d.1555), was cautiously critical of Geoffrey's stories, thus taking a position not unlike that of Paolo Emilio in France. Virgilio was fiercely opposed by John Leland (d. 1552) and others who, none the less, shared their adversary's humanist learning and orientation. The greatest of Tudor antiquarians, William Camden (1551-1623), discreetly professed neutrality since the evidence was so uncertain. But he clearly had no use for Geoffrey's Brutus and his Trojans when tracing the Britons and Gauls back to the ark. An outspoken debunker was John Twyne (d. 1581), an obscure schoolmaster, whose *De rebus Albionis, Britannicis atque Anglicis* was written before 1550, but not printed until 1590.²⁸ In England, as on the continent, the learned controversies over the nation's dawn were conducted with feeling and heat. Tempers flared and words were not minced.²⁹ But somehow the passions remained safely confined to

²⁷ See above pp. 121-26.

²⁸ Arthur B. Ferguson, *Clio Unbound. Perception of the social and cultural past in Renaissance England* (Durham, N.C. 1979) 104ff. T.D. Kendrick, *British Antiquity* (London 1950) 4ff., 71ff. F.J. Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought* (San Marino, Ca. 1967) 124ff. F. Smith Fussner, *Tudor History and the Historians* (New York 1970) 251ff. Stuart Piggott, *The Druids* (London 1968) 131ff. William Camden, *Britannia 1695. A facsimile of the 1695 edition published by Edmund Gibson* (Newton Abbot, Devon. 1971) iv-xii, 28, 307-11.

²⁹ See e.g. John Leland's *Assertio inclytissimi Arturii regis Britanniae* (London 1544), which forty years later was still relevant enough to be translated into English. Both versions are reprinted with Christopher Middleton, *The Famous Historie of Chinon on England* ed. W.E. Mead, Early English Text Society o.s. 165 (London 1925, repr. 1971) esp. 93f., 97. This

the ivory tower of learning. It would seem that the scholars themselves were able to appreciate the fanciful character of their debates, which may have protected them from a much grimmer reality. To be sure, there were accusations of impiety and disloyalty, but they were not acted upon. At a time when other men were beheaded for treason and burnt for heresy, those who denied their monarchs a diluvian or Trojan descent had comparatively little to fear. In many cases verbal venom was primarily reserved for foreigners and intended as a positive expression of patriotic fervour.

III

Maximilian I and the Portrait Galleries

All things considered, mythical and legendary lineages were to Renaissance men a hobby that could be indulged with a great deal of learning, or with very little. To their rulers it meant propaganda rather than high politics, the pursuit of decorum and beauty, of playful prestige rather than actual power.³⁰ Nowhere is this saving grace more visible than in the vast genealogical enterprises of Emperor Maximilian I (1459-1519). When the Habsburg genealogy had successfully been traced back to Noah, Maximilian's fool, Kunz von der Rosen, once brought an old beggar and a retired soldiers' harlot before the emperor and his company. The two petitioned Maximilian to support them since they were his kin, descendants of Adam like

pamphlet is notable for its angry attacks upon the "heresy" of the "Italian" Polidoro Virgilio. It is dedicated to Henry VIII, but apparently did not harm Virgilio's standing at court.

³⁰ It was a very rare case when Spanish historiographers of the late fifteenth century pointed to moral reasons for rejecting some -- by no means all -- mythical ancestors of their kings. Hercules was eliminated on grounds of his adultery and piracy; and so was Hispanus, his alleged grandson, because he was an usurper. Moreover, the ultimate motive for elimination was not moral concern so much as patriotic xenophobia. Outside Spain, Hercules joined Paris and other mythical heroes of dubious conduct, whose moral lapses simply failed to be taken into account. Not, as has been suggested, because he was predominantly seen as type of Christ, but because the difference between playful genealogy and actual heredity was well understood. See Robert Tate, "Mythology in Spanish Historiography of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance" *Hispanic Review* 22 (1954) 1-18, esp. 10f. Stephen Orgel, "The Example of Hercules" in *Mythographie der frühen Neuzeit. Ihre Anwendung in den Künsten* ed. Walther Killy (Wiesbaden 1984) 25-35, esp. 33f.

himself.³¹ Maximilian laughed; if he could well bear to be mocked on account of his genealogical passion, he none the less indulged it lavishly both with his personal attention and his generally scarce funds. As early as 1498 a Dr. Konrad Turst of Zurich was commissioned to search for documents about the early Habsburgs in the very region of their ancestral castle. Such leading humanists as Willibald Pirckheimer, Konrad Peutinger, Johannes Stabius and Johannes Cuspinianus were engaged as consultants, and so was Abbot Trithemius, who earned Maximilian's special trust and was even questioned by him about the salvation of unbelievers.³² The emperor's court historiographers, Ladislaus Sunthaim and Jakob Mennel (Manlius), devoted all their time to the great genealogical enterprise. Maximilian requested that their findings be supported by heraldic and numismatic evidence and did not spare rewards for any one presenting new records of the German past. Seals and sepulchral statues were sketched and funeral inscriptions copied. Donor's portraits on altar pieces and painted glass windows were studied; in some cases Maximilian had the originals transferred to Innsbruck, where his craftsmen were at work. If genealogy entertained him, it also served a grand dynastical program, whose message was to be driven home through the medium of splendid art work.³³

In an early stage Maximilian favoured a theory that connected the Habsburgs with the Roman families of Colonna and Pierleoni, which claimed to hail from the senatorial patriciate of the Republic. Subsequently the Roman connection tended to be played down in favour of a Trojan-Merovingian one. The problem then arose whether the Habsburg lineage also included Carolingians. The Merovingians were legitimate rulers, but the Carolingians had usurped the throne. On the other hand, it was no easy matter to forego the enormous prestige of a descent from Charlemagne. When tracing his lineage back to Clovis and Hector, Maximilian attached great weight to his links with the old houses of Burgundy, Lorraine and Brabant — links that had been renewed through his own marriage to Mary of Burgundy. Likewise, he appreciated the fact that some of his

³¹ E. Harzen, "Maximilian des Ersten Stammbaum und dessen 'zotende Mendl'" *Deutsches Kunstblatt* 5 (1854) 237-40.

³² *Curiositas regia. Octo quaestiones ... a Maximiliano I Caesare Joanni Trithemio ... propositae et ab eodem pie et solide solutae* (Douai 1621).

³³ Simon Laschitzer, "Die Genealogie des Kaisers Maximilian I." *Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses* 7 (1888).

Habsburg forefathers had taken wives from the Slavonic dynasties of eastern Europe. He liked to think that all truly noble blood of Europe had somehow flowed together in his veins. Finally, towards the end of his life, the lineage was pushed back from the Trojans to Osiris and Hercules Libycus as well as to Ham and Noah.³⁴ Claim was laid to a sacred tradition along with the secular one. A famous illustration of 1518 shows three chains of world government; on the left a golden chain leads from the kings of ancient Israel to Christ the King and his successors, the popes. On the right a silver chain leads from Aeneas and Romulus to the rulers of the Holy Roman Empire, while the iron chain in the middle leads from Hector of Troy to the Habsburgs. In the end all three chains get entwined in the person of Maximilian, the new Prester John.³⁵ In light of such reverie it is fitting that the widowed Maximilian in 1511 had undertaken steps to secure the papacy for himself.

The ultimate realization of Maximilian's genealogico-dynastical ideas was to be his tomb. It was never completed, but the parts now assembled in Innsbruck adequately convey the grandiose idea of the whole arrangement. Posterity was to behold the emperor, surrounded by an imposing crowd of free-standing statues cast in bronze. There were to be one hundred statuettes of saints connected with the house of Habsburg and thirty-four busts of Roman emperors from Julius Caesar to Theodosius, the last to rule the undivided Empire. The presumptuous point Maximilian wished to make was that none but himself was the legitimate heir of this unbroken succession. Since the imperial office was perpetual, it was appropriate to include the busts of such emperors as Caligula and Nero, with whose unattractive record Maximilian could not wish to be associated. While all of these were doubtlessly to be placed on the outer fringes of the gigantic funeral monument, Maximilian's body was to rest surrounded by forty statues exceeding life size and representing his real and ideal

³⁴ The progress of Maximilian's genealogical researches was punctuated by rivalries among his scholars. Mennel and Suntheim set great store by Hunibald's chronicle, 'discovered' by Trithemius. Stabius correctly dismissed it as sheer fantasy but then went on to nonplus his rivals by tracing the lineage back to Ham and Noah. See Joachimsen, *Geschichtsauffassung* cit. 198-203; Hermann Wiesflecker, *Kaiser Maximilian* (Munich 1971-86) V 362-80; Alphons Lhotsky, "Apis Colonna. Fabeln und Theorien über die Abkunft der Habsburger" in *Aufsätze und Vorträge* (Vienna 1971 —) II 7-102.

³⁵ Anna Coreth, "Dynastisch-politische Ideen Kaiser Maximilians I." first part, *Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Staatsarchivs* 3 (1950) 81-105. Wiesflecker, *Kaiser Maximilian* cit. V 448-52.

ancestors, male and female, among them Caesar, King Arthur, Theodoric, Clovis, Charlemagne, Godfrey of Bouillon and Theobert, legendary first count of Habsburg.³⁶ The context clearly was a historical one, and factual accuracy, as far as it was attainable, mattered. For the gallery of the Habsburg saints, for instance, Mennel had collected data on no less than 123 candidates for his master's consideration. Historical accuracy, however, was less indispensable than imagination. Maximilian clearly took Arthur and Theodoric of epic fame and legendary Theobert to be historical, but the monument as a whole is a dynastico-political statement, and not a record of historical fact. Maximilian would have scoffed at his successors, who tried to eliminate the more dubious ancestors simply by relabelling some of the extant statues. Charles V personally ordered that Theodoric was to be got rid of in this fashion, but the order was not carried out and Theodoric remained his own self. Julius Caesar and Ottokar were less lucky. Since both were highly implausible as forebears of the Habsburgs, Ferdinand I had them eliminated from the current plans for the completion of his grandfather's tomb. Likewise the statue of legendary Theobert, found to be in bad repair, was transformed into historical Ferdinand, king of Portugal. The slant of these modifications is clearly revealed by a new plan for the completion of the monument, drawn up around 1560, but fortunately not carried out. It cut out all the more fanciful characters and, in their place, provided for additional members of the house of Habsburg. In other words, Maximilian's imaginative ideological programme would have been replaced by a pedantic chain of historical ancestors.³⁷ Such was not Maximilian's aim; he saw that little was to be gained from restoring a faceless visibility to a company of obscure Habsburg counts and dukes, who had left no mark in history. In the end, historicity alone was meaningless; the mythical and legendary dimensions were needed to save history from petty historicity.

Much as Maximilian cared for historical accuracy and would have despised the cheap device of relabelling, it is clear that for the dress, the headgear and even the faces of many figures he would have to rely on imagination. Maximilian was a typical child of the Renaissance in that he desired to express his ideas in visible form. Thus he must have

³⁶ Vinzenz Oberhammer, *Die Bronzestandbilder des Maximiliangrabmales in der Hofkirche zu Innsbruck* (Innsbruck 1935). Erich Egg, *Die Hofkirche in Innsbruck* (Innsbruck 1974).

³⁷ Oberhammer, *Die Bronzestandbilder* cit. 56, 74ff., 145.

accepted that visibility, despite the new realism of Renaissance painters and sculptors, could not be achieved without some liberal concessions to *fabula*. To be visibly united, in the hour of death, with one's ancestors was not a new desire either; some precedents for Maximilian's ideas may be of interest here. At the funerals of Roman dignitaries and especially emperors it was customary for the masks of the deceased himself and his forebears to walk in the procession. Maximilian liked to model himself after Augustus, and Augustus' body was carried to the pyre, covered by his own wax-work effigy and followed by the *personae* of ancestors and other luminaries all the way back to Romulus.³⁸ Funeral imagery was also alive in the Middle Ages. When Edward II of England was deposed and died in 1327, accounts of his funeral record the manufacture of a wooden image in his likeness ("*quamdam ymaginem de ligno ad similitudinem dicti domini E. defuncti*"). Similar effigies, made of wood or leather, were prepared for the funerals of other members of the English royal families, but — at least in the fourteenth century — a facial resemblance was neither attempted nor expected. The fitting of such royal puppets with death masks made of wax did not occur until later. It is documented for Charles VII of France in 1461.³⁹

The quest for authenticity, as opposed to imagination, presented a dilemma that relates to every sort of portraits. While Roman portraiture is famous for the realistic rendering of idiosyncratic features, medieval artists — although not without exception — disregarded lifelikeness, identifying their figures by such means as inscriptions, coats of arms and insignia of office. In large-scale representations of English kings, undisputable elements of portraiture are not found until the reign of Richard II (1377-99).⁴⁰ In Italy, on the other hand, expectations began to change somewhat earlier. Giotto's fresco of Pope Boniface VIII proclaiming the Jubilee of 1300,

³⁸ Cassius Dio 56.34. This passage was not printed until the Greek *editio princeps* of Dio (Paris 1548), but the Roman custom was widely known and Peutingier, who assembled at Maximilian's request a huge documentation of the Roman emperors, might even have known Dio from manuscripts. For Peutingier's documentation and Maximilian's special regard for Augustus, see Florens Deuchler, "Maximilian I. und die Kaiserviten Suetons" in: *Michael Stettler zum 70. Geburtstag. Von Angesicht zu Angesicht. Portraitsstudien*, ed. F. Deuchler et al. (Berne 1983) 128-49.

³⁹ Wolfgang Brückner, *Bildnis und Brauch. Studien zur Bildfunktion der Effigies* (Berlin 1966) 68ff., 108. See, also for what follows here, the substantial article "Portraiture" in *Encyclopedia of World Art* (New York 1959-68) XI 469-515, esp. the sections on the Middle Ages, 483-87, by Kurt Bauch, and on the subsequent centuries, 584-501, by Eugenio Battisti.

⁴⁰ Frederick Hepburn, *Portraits of the Later Plantagenets* (The Boydell Press 1986) 6.

in Rome's Lateran basilica, is often supposed to be an actual portrait.⁴¹ Giotto may perhaps have attempted as much in some other cases and thus started a trend. We had seen earlier that Petrarch resumed Plutarch's concept of serial biographies of famous men of the past. The idea of matching such a chain of written lives with visible portraits may also go back to him. We know that he advised Francesco da Carrara, who wished to decorate his palace in Padua with a series of historical portraits fashioned after Petrarch's *De viris illustribus*.⁴² Around 1470 Federigo da Montefeltro, duke of Urbino, commissioned Justus of Ghent to embellish his *studiolo* with the portraits of twenty-eight famous writers, ranging from classical philosophers and poets to Church Fathers and early Renaissance luminaries. Where possible, the likenesses were drawn from ancients busts and Renaissance portrait medals. Presiding over the others was Duke Federigo himself, portrayed "*al naturale, che non gli mancava nulla se non lo spirito*."⁴³ The very concept of the *studiolo*, a private and intimate place of study for public figures, owes a good deal to Petrarch. Among those who may have drawn inspiration from him was not only Maximilian,⁴⁴ but also Paolo Giovio (1483-1552). When Maximilian died, the monumental garland of his real and spiritual kin still unfinished, Giovio had already begun to assemble his famous gallery of historical and contemporary portraits later to be located at his villa near Como. As a writer of some talent and fecundity, he had penned in his *Vitae* the lives of many notables, often of recent memory. Now the gallery of painted portraits was to follow,

⁴¹ Ladner, *Die Papstbildnisse* cit. II 288-96.

⁴² Guido Martelotti in the introduction of his critical ed. of Petrarch's *De viris illustribus* I (Florence 1964) xiif. Ernest H. Wilkins, *Petrarch's Later Years* (Cambridge, Mass. 1959) 283-302. Theodore E. Mommsen, "Petrarch and the Decoration of the Sala Virorum Illustrium in Padua," *Art Bulletin* 34 (1952) 95-116, repr. in his *Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. E. Rice (Ithaca, N.Y. 1959) 130-74. A precedent was created during the 'Carolingian Renaissance;' Charlemagne's *aula regia* at Ingelheim was decorated with portraits of the emperor himself and his ancestors matched by portraits of classical and biblical leaders. See Percy E. Schramm, *Die deutschen Kaiser und Könige in Bildern ihrer Zeit* (Leipzig 1928) 37, 46; Peter Munz, *Life in the Age of Charlemagne* (London 1969) 154f.

⁴³ The dictum is by Vespasiano da Bisticci; see Luciano Cheles, *The Studiolo of Urbino. An Iconographic Investigation* (Wiesbaden 1986) 15f. and passim; Kerstin Kühnast, *Studien zum Studiolo zu Urbino* (Cologne 1987). The other portraitees were Plato, Aristotle, Ptolemy, Boethius, Cicero, Seneca, Homer, Virgil, Gregory the Great, Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine, Moses, Solomon, Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Euclid, Vittorino da Feltre, Solon, Bartolus, Hippocrates, Pietro d'Abano, Pius II, Bessarion, Albertus Magnus, Sixtus IV, Dante and Petrarch. Fourteen of these can now be seen in the Urbino palace.

⁴⁴ Deuchler, "Maximilian und die Kaiserviten Suetons" cit. 135f.

accompanied by Giovio's written *Elogia*. Only scattered fragments of his collection have survived, but by a recent count he had assembled at least 413 portraits.⁴⁵ Although Giovio was a bishop, his clear preference was for secular figures, both of political and literary fame, ranging from Romulus, Alexander the Great, Attila, Tamerlane and the Ottoman sultans to Guido Cavalcanti and Dante. Giovio's contemporaries were enthused and co-operated by supplying authentic sketches. The Ottoman sultans were drawn after miniatures that Virginio Orsini had received from none other than Khair ad-Din Barbarossa, the corsair turned Turkish admiral.⁴⁶ Giovio carefully chose the artists who painted, often anonymously, his portraits. One may assume that he did not order a piece unless he had a model that he considered to be adequate. He increased his collection as opportunity arose; mythical heroes were not often included, but when they were, predictably, no effort was made to characterize them as unhistorical.⁴⁷ The worthies whose portraits he owned included Paris, Romulus and Numa Pompilius (but not Aeneas), Aristotle (but not Plato), Caesar (but not Augustus) and Cicero (but not Virgil).

After Giovio's death and before his gallery was dispersed, the pictures were actually united with the biographies he had published in his books. An Italian protestant refugee, the Basel printer Pietro Perna, sent the artist Tobias Stimmer to Como and between 1560 and 1582 printed no less than ten editions, illustrating Giovio's texts with Stimmer's sketches.⁴⁸ In Giovio's wake, portrait galleries became fashionable in sixteenth and seventeenth-century palaces, especially perhaps in France, and so became printed collections of portrait engravings. André Thevet broke with Giovio's unsystematic precedent, presenting his *Vrais portraits et vies des hommes illustres* (Paris 1584) in topical and chronological order. He emphasized with pride how scrupulously he had selected the models for his engravings. In his preface to the first volume, he took issue with those who doubted whether any authentic likenesses might have been preserved for two thousand years and more. In the individual biographies he

⁴⁵ *Atti del Convegno Paolo Giovio. Il rinascimento e la memoria (Como, 3-5 giugno 1983)* (Como 1985) esp. 169-80: Bruno Fasola, "Per un nuovo catalogo della Collezione Gioviana" in *Collezioni Giovio. Le immagini e la storia* (Como 1983).

⁴⁶ Eugène Müntz, *Le Musée des portraits de Paul Jove* (Paris 1900) 12.

⁴⁷ See the *Elogia* of Romulus and Numa in: Paolo Giovio, *Opera VIII: Gli Elogi degli uomini illustri*, ed. Renzo Meregazzi (Rome 1972) 237f.

⁴⁸ Werner Kaegi, *Historische Meditationen. Erste Folge* (Basel 1942) 137-39.

went to some length in identifying the source from which the portrait had been copied. Perhaps a dozen biographies show an empty frame in the place where the portrait ought to have been engraved. This was Thevet's way of demonstrating that he would not stoop so low as to include imaginary likenesses, when a source was not available. His commitment to visual authenticity can be appreciated, if his work is compared to Heinrich Pantaleon's *Prosopographia*, published less than twenty years earlier. Thevet did not balk at copying some of Pantaleon's carefully annotated texts,⁴⁹ but he would never have condescended to the random repetition of the same simple woodcut portraits that occurred in Pantaleon's volume. In fact, Thevet's sense of historical criticism is at its best when applied to visual evidence. While not hesitating to repeat the tale of Constantine's leprosy and baptism by Silvester, he took Giovio to task for depicting Theodore Gaza, a Greek priest, in Italian garb and Columbus, who was married, in monastic habit. In both cases the justness of Thevet's criticism is open to question. He was on safer ground when he criticized a recent portrait that showed Gregory of Nanzianzus, in defiance of Greek custom, clean-shaven, in the garb of a Catholic priest with a mitre and a crozier not yet in use at his time.⁵⁰ Thevet was right, of course; but a beard and appropriate apparel alone cannot tell us what St. Gregory looked like. It is no longer thought today that a reliable likeness of him exists. The desire for authentic documentation is never easy to reconcile with a delight in imaginary symbolism, and thus the Renaissance passion for visual representation gives new relevance to an old dilemma. It also brings to light a new dimension in *historia's* contest with *fabula* precisely at a time when historical thinking entered an era of growing sophistication. Historiographers may state in their texts that certain points are not reliably recorded and therefore cannot be included in the narrative, but a painter cannot leave an empty space in the place of unknown particulars. This aspect will come into fuller focus, when we are dealing with the history painters of the nineteenth century.

⁴⁹ See above ch. IV n. 93.

⁵⁰ André Thevet, *Vrais pourtraits et vies des hommes illustres grecs, latins et payens, recueilliz de leur tableaux, livres, medailles antiques et modernes* (Paris 1584) I 18v, 37 r-v, II 177r-v.

IV

The Myth of the Golden Age

The myth perhaps most commonly associated with the Renaissance is the notion of a Golden Age. It is present everywhere in many versions and disguises, evoked under its own name or associated with other mythical *loci* such as Elysium, the Parnassus, Arcadia, Atlantis, the abodes of the Hesperides and the Hyperboreans, and eventually Utopia. It was seen either proudly as a goal to be achieved in the near future, if not indeed already accomplished, or as a remote ideal to be held against a sadly inadequate reality. In the wake of Jacob Burckhardt's classic appraisal of Italian civilization at the threshold of the modern age, the Renaissance itself was mythicized, and the Golden Age came to provide a telling symbol for the period — a symbol for a society that ardently longed for perfection and was ultimately bound to reap for its efforts either illusions or disillusionment. The focal point of what is often called the modern Renaissance 'myth' was Florence; and it was especially in Florence that the Golden Age was conjured up. The ancient Age of Gold was forecast in Dante's religious visions;⁵¹ Lorenzo the Magnificent and, above all, Politian devoted splendid verses to it. In 1513 the next generation of Florentines put on a mythistorical procession in honour of the newly elected Medici pope, Leo X. After six floats illustrating the primeval Golden Age followed by Numa Pompilius, Titus Manlius Torquatus, Caesar, Augustus and Trajan, the crowning effect was a last float, depicting the resurgence of the Golden Age under the Medici. On a terrestrial globe lay a man, as if dead, armed with rusty weapons. He represented the Iron Age, and out of his back a naked boy was emerging, completely covered with leaf of gold. The boy died

⁵¹ In a famous passage of *Purgatory*, 28.139-44, Dante finds that the Earthly Paradise he is then visiting is the true locus of that Golden Age, which the ancient poets imagined to be on Mount Parnassus. Earlier, in *Purgatory* 22.64-66, 130-50, Statius acknowledges Virgil's guidance in making his way first towards the Parnassus and then towards the Christian faith. The three poets become aware of a tree loaded with sweet-smelling fruit. Passing it, gluttons find that they cannot climb it, while a voice from out of the tree states examples of abstinence and frugality, among them "*Lo secol primo, quant'oro fu bello, / fe' savorose con fame le ghiande, / e nettare con sete ogni ruscello.*"

afterwards, it was said, as result of his apparel,⁵² and, again, this sad accident could symbolize the fate of Renaissance Italy: surfeit leading to exhaustion and, sometimes, collapse. To sum up the concept, Politian may be cited again. His vision is representative of countless others. His Golden Age offers a life of freedom and the simple bounty of nature, sufficient for frugal existence in the form of acorns and honey. There were as yet no houses, neither husbandry nor agriculture, no navigation, no war, no amorous passions and “no criminal thirst for the cruel gold.”⁵³

Politian's verses offer an apt summary of the universal myth of primeval good times in the specific form that evolved in the Graeco-Roman world and was passed on to Renaissance Europe. It was Hesiod who made a memorable beginning. His golden race has been discussed in another context.⁵⁴ It was created by the Olympian gods, who granted an effortless life of plenty, peace and joy. In the third century B.C. another Greek, Aratus, allowed the golden race the use of ploughing-oxen, provided they would not eat them. More significantly, he introduced Astraea, the virgin goddess of justice, to rule over it. Subsequently, the depravity of the third race would send her fleeing to the starry sky.⁵⁵ At the turn of the Christian era, Ovid cast the Greek idea of four metallic ages into a Latin form that became the classic model for subsequent literary pilgrimages towards the Golden Age — an age of symbolic gold that to Ovid presented a harsh contrast with his own Iron Age, obsessed with metallic gold and the

⁵² Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite*, biography of Jacopo Pontormo. Cf. John Addington Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy. Italian Literature* (London 1881) I 397f. Similar manifestations must have taken place many times, for instance in 1550, when King Henry II of France held his entry into the city of Rouen. On that occasion the Golden Age Returned was represented by a statue. When watching a comedy performed in Paris for the same Henry II, Cesare Ripa (d. before 1625) saw characters representing the four metallic ages. While the others were *donne*, the Golden Age was a *bellissima giovanetta*, holding apples and acorns. See Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia* (Venice 1645) 188 (first published in 1493); Henry Kamen, “Golden age, iron age: a conflict of concepts in the Renaissance” *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 4 (1974) 135-56, esp. 138.

⁵³ Angelo Poliziano, *Stanze* 1.20-21: “In cotal guisa già l'antiche genti / Si crede esser godute al secol d'oro. / Né fatte ancor le madri eron dolenti / De' morti figli al marzial lavoro; / Né si credeva ancor la vita a' venti; / Né del giogo doleasi ancora il toro. / Lor case eron frozute querce et grande / Ch'avean nel tronco miel, ne' rami ghiande. / Non era ancor la scelerata sete / Del crudel oro entrata nel bel mondo. / Viveansi in libertà le genti liete; / E non solcato il campo era secondo. / Fortuna invidiosa a lor quiete / Ruppe ogni legge e pietà misse in fondo. / Lussuria entrò ne' petti e quel furor / Che la meschina gente chiama amore.”

⁵⁴ See above p. 22 and H.C. Baldry, “Who Invented the Golden Age?” *The Classical Quarterly* n.s. 2 (1952) 83-92.

⁵⁵ Aratus, *Phaenomena* 96-136.

"cursed love of gain."⁵⁶ A generation before Ovid, however, Virgil had given a new direction to fantasies about the Golden Age — a direction that was to prove momentous in the Renaissance. Virgil no longer mused nostalgically about the past; he was the first to herald the return of the Golden Age. Inspired by the expected birth of an illustrious child in the imperial family, Virgil's famous fourth eclogue proclaims the dawn of a new era. Finally the world is beginning to change, and change dramatically, for the better.

The vision of the future presented in Virgil's fourth eclogue is extraordinary by any standards. There is a brief reference to the last remnants of wickedness, the elimination of which will require a final renewal of warfare (lines 31-36). But when the babe-about-to-be-born is grown to manhood, he will usher in the return of the Golden Age, resplendent in its original simplicity. Trade will end, and with it the sailing of the seas. The ploughman will unhook his oxen from the yoke (lines 37-41). Astraea and Saturn will resume their reign (line 6). Virgil's vision is indeed chiliastic and, one might argue, of the same grandeur as Marx's vision of a final struggle leading to a class-less and state-less society of justice. Alone the beauty of verbal expression — which readers must experience for themselves — would have ensured the attention the fourth eclogue was to receive through the centuries. In addition it offered its medieval readers intriguing parallels with their own Christian beliefs.⁵⁷ Sadly, it was not so much with this bold, ethereal vision of the fourth eclogue that Virgil set a precedent, but rather with the down-to-earth flattery he used in the sixth book of his *Aeneid* (lines 791-807). This other prediction of the Golden Age is little more than adulation for the Emperor Augustus, the son of deified Caesar, who would bring about another Golden Age in the world once ruled by Saturn and expand Rome's dominion to the remotest regions of the globe. Here boastful propaganda for Roman power has replaced the transcendent chiliasm of the eclogue. The typical characteristics of the primitive Golden Age are no longer mentioned and evidently do not apply here. So, unfortunately, Virgil's beautiful legacy to the Renaissance, the idea of the Golden Age Reborn, came with the blemish of expedient flattery.

⁵⁶ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* I 76-150.

⁵⁷ It was particularly tempting to combine Virgil's reference to the Virgin (really Astraea) with his tribute to the saviour boy, who would have divine life (i.e. he would be deified after his death), and to his mother. In general see Marianne Wifstrand Schiebe, *Das ideale Dasein bei Tibull und die Goldzeitkonzeption Vergils* (Uppsala 1981).

Another facet of classical thinking about the Golden Age was taken up by the Renaissance humanists with more appealing results, albeit not without a measure of self-complacency. The point had been stated by Seneca in one *prim* sentence. Wrote he: "In the age we call Golden, Posidonius holds that kingship was conferred upon the wise."⁵⁸ His reference is to Posidonius of Apamea in Syria (died c. 50 B.C.), who had travelled as far as Gaul and written on the Druids and other aspects of Celtic religion and culture. Behind Seneca's statement lies a tradition that tended to conflate actual knowledge about the Druids with Plato's concept of the ideal state, ruled by philosophers. A further element in that tradition was the myth of the Hyperboreans, a virtuous race of vegetarians, beloved by Apollo, living in a northern Never-Never-land.⁵⁹ Virgil too, in the fourth eclogue (line 10), placed his Golden Age Reborn under the kingship of Apollo, the patron of Muses and philosophers. Thus, odd as it perhaps may seem, the Golden Age, as seen in classical Antiquity, accommodated both the noble savage and the philosopher-king.

After lying low in the Middle Ages,⁶⁰ the myth of the Golden Age sprang to life again with the advent of the Renaissance. By the end of the period it had become commonplace, as we have seen. For better or for worse, the influence of Virgil proved decisive. As we know, Renaissance folk developed a taste for myth-making with a view to political propaganda. In keeping with that propensity, the Golden Age of Renaissance writers normally is the Golden Age Reborn, and reborn under the star of an illustrious leader. Anticipating the republican sentiment of other Italian humanists of the early Renaissance, Petrarch hailed Cola di Rienzo as the leader towards a new Golden Age. To the Rome of his own day, Cola was Romulus, the founder, Brutus, the liberator, and Camillus, the saviour, all in

⁵⁸ Seneca, *Epistles* 90.5.

⁵⁹ Stuart Piggott, *The Druids* cit. 91ff. For the relevant fragments of Posidonius, see J.J. Tierney, "The Celtic Ethnography of Posidonius" *Proceedings Royal Irish Academy* 60, sect. C (1960) 189-275, esp. 251, 269, 271f.

⁶⁰ Medieval references to a Golden Age — only that specific myth is being examined here — appear to have been surprisingly rare. On the other hand, the Christian interpretation of Virgil's fourth eclogue could create expectations of a future and final age of peace and justice, especially if Virgil was combined with biblical prophecies (e.g. Isaiah 11.6-9 and 35.4-10) and their echoes in patristic writings. See Walter Veit, *Studien zur Geschichte des Topos der goldenen Zeit von der Antike bis zum 18. Jahrhundert* (Cologne Dr. phil. dissertation 1960/61) 73-86, 103. See also Harry Levin, *The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance* (Bloomington, Ind. 1969) xx, 34 and *passim*, for some of the following.

one person.⁶¹ Soon, however, Petrarch's republicanism lost out to Virgil's concept of the Golden Age reborn under the auspices of an illustrious monarch. If the new direction made it more tempting for humanist authors to indulge in boneless flattery, it should also be remembered that flattery itself was an exciting exercise in the new-born art of Ciceronian eloquence. The princes, having plenty of gold, or at least pretending that they had, were the natural patrons of the new Golden Age. Not content with the accolades of others, Lorenzo the Magnificent acclaimed himself in this role. In a grand tournament on the eve of his accession to supremacy he displayed on his pennon the motto: "*Le tems revient*."⁶² The Emperor Charles V received analogous praise. At the time of his accession to the Spanish throne, a member of the Castilian *Cortes* exclaimed: "The Golden Age so long awaited is now with us." Ludovico Ariosto interrupted the stately flow of his epic, *Orlando furioso*, to extol Charles as the ruler who had brought back *Astraea*, after the first cycle of seven world ages had run its course. The accession of Henry II of France in 1547 prompted Joachim du Bellay to hail the new monarch in similar fashion.⁶³ Likewise, Elizabethan Englishmen never tired of celebrating their own Virgin-Queen as *Astraea redux* presiding over a new Golden Age.⁶⁴

It is clear that the Golden Age Reborn under the auspices of some glorious prince was never meant to be a return to the primitive condition of cave-dwellers and acorn-eaters. Quite the contrary, the new age deserved golden accolades because it brought about the rebirth of better learning and genuine culture. This is what Virgil must have had in mind, when he placed the Augustan Age of Gold under the aegis of Apollo. The Medicean one too was always seen as a

⁶¹ Francesco Petrarca, *Le familiari* cit. 18.1.18-19 (ed. Rossi III 268). This letter, dated 23 November 1353, is a sad reflexion of Cola's failure). For Petrarch's letters to the Roman people, Avignon, autumn 1352, and to Cola and the Roman people, Avignon, mid-June 1347, see *Der Briefwechsel des Cola di Rienzo* ed. K. Burdach and P. Piur (Berlin 1922-29) in Burdach's *Vom Mittelalter zur Reformation* II-1(1) 81, II-3 75, II-4 169. Before Petrarch, Dante in his *Monarchia* and Cola himself had used Virgil's vision of the Virgin and the return of Saturn's reign for political ends. See Gustavo Costa, *La leggenda dei secoli d'oro nella letteratura italiana* (Bari 1972) 6, 16 and passim for what follows here.

⁶² Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy. Italian Literature* cit. I 405.

⁶³ Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso* 15.24f. (this sequence was newly inserted in the third ed. of 1532). Kamen, "Golden age, iron age" cit. 138f. Costa, *La leggenda dei secoli d'oro* cit. 84-89.

⁶⁴ Frances A. Yates, *Astraea. The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (London 1975) 29-87, also 208-14 and passim. Ferguson, *Clio Unbound* cit. 349.

triumph of refined culture. Politian's and also Lorenzo's own verses⁶⁵ about the Golden Age were among the finest written in Renaissance Italy. Four months after Lorenzo's death Marsilio Ficino wrote a now famous letter to the Dutch astronomer Paul of Middleburg (13 September 1492), in which he praised Florence as the centre of culture reborn. But "golden minds," he said, were to be found elsewhere too, among them the German inventors of printing. This was not the first time that Ficino had mused about the Golden Age in his letters. Even as a student he had fathered upon Plato the statement "that there was once a Golden Age when wisdom reigned, and that if ever philosophy reigns again the Golden Age will return."⁶⁶ Perhaps the finest tribute to Lorenzo's presidency over the Golden Age came, three quarters of a century after his death, from Giorgio Vasari. This is how Vasari began his biography of Botticelli: "In that very time of the Magnificent Lorenzo the Elder de' Medici, which for talented persons was truly an Age of Gold, there also flourished ... Sandro, called Botticello."⁶⁷ That praise came from Vasari, the historian; but Vasari, the painter, also wished to pay tribute to the Medici. He meant to portray Cosimo, Lorenzo the Magnificent and Leo X in a fresco he described as follows: "the freedom and tranquillity of the Golden Age of Saturn, who gently puts himself asleep, and Janus too, ... compared to the government of the foremost Medici."⁶⁸ In 1517 Erasmus too succumbed for a short while to the magic of the old myth. His excited proclamations of the

⁶⁵ For Politian see above n. 53. Lorenzo de' Medici, in his *Selve d'amore* 2.84-96, offered an even fuller description of the initial Golden Age. The finest evocation, however, is in 2.35: The city of Florence, resplendent in the beauty of the beloved woman, rivals the Earthly Paradise as well as the classical Golden Age.

⁶⁶ Ficino also wrote to Giovanni Francesco Ippoliti: "It is said that the Golden Age once existed because of such a [philosopher-]ruler, and Plato prophesied it will return only when power and wisdom come together in the same mind." Marsilio Ficino, *Opera omnia* (Basel 1576, repr. 1962) I 944; *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino* transl. by members of the Language Department of the London School of Economics (London 1975-88) III 21, 31, cf. also IV 56 (letters 4.13, 18 and 5.41). In astrological terms the union of ruler and philosopher was consumed in the "great" planetary conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn. Ficino may have launched his Latin translation of *Platonis opera omnia* precipitously in 1484, because Paul of Middleburg had calculated the "great" conjunction to take place in that year. See James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance* (Leiden 1990) I 302-4.

⁶⁷ This beginning did not yet figure in the first edition of the *Vite* (Florence 1550); see *Le Opere di Giorgio Vasari* ed. G. Milanesi (Florence 1878-85) III 309.

⁶⁸ Description of a frieze panel, now lost or perhaps never executed, for the Terrazzo di Saturno, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence. See Ettore Allegri and Alessandro Cecchi, *Palazzo Vecchio e i Medici. Guida storica* (Florence 1980) 107.

dawning Golden Age of international peace and princely patronage for scholars make one forget how quickly he was to abandon that dream.⁶⁹

The classic versions from Hesiod to the Book of Daniel suggested a primeval Age of Gold, followed in descending order by periods cast in lesser metals or even clay. Along the course of its history mankind keeps deteriorating; it has lost its original purity and valour. Henry Kamen has shown that, however dim or bright their hopes for the return of a Golden Age, many Renaissance writers knew only too well that theirs was, after all, an age of base iron.⁷⁰ Indeed, was there anywhere a path leading back to the Age of Gold? One of the most successful myths of the Renaissance age was created by Erasmus' great friend, Thomas More. It is true that the author of *Utopia* ingeniously combined the unattainable perfection of life in the Nowhere-Island with down-to-earth comments about some flawed, but corrigible, institutions of the English island kingdom. On the other hand, it was exactly the realization that the best was always elusive, indeed 'utopian', that caused so many subsequent writers, especially in Italy,⁷¹ to model their own pipe-dreams after More's book. Rabelais' "Abbaye de Thélème" (c. 1534)⁷² also comes to mind here. It too is hardly a blueprint for action by social reformers. Others, however, tried to be realistic. In his *Methodus* (1566), Jean Bodin sneered at the primitive so-called Ages of Gold and Silver, when men had lived like brute beasts. He drew a sharp contrast between those early days and the steady progress of civilization achieved in his own time. But would it last? Bodin also retained the notion of human history moving in cycles.⁷³

The fiction — for this is what the notion is — of history moving in cycles and thus repeating itself was alive throughout the Renaissance. And, as happened in other ages, it led to optimistic as well as pessimistic assessments of past and present. On the side of pessimism, one encounters towards the year 1500 a fearful expectance

⁶⁹ *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi*, ed. P.S. Allen et al. (Oxford 1906-58) II Epp. 533:16, 541:8-9, 566:34, III 967:37; cf. *Moriae encomium*, ASD IV-3 76, 110. Johan Huizinga, *Erasmus of Rotterdam* (Phaidon, London 1952) 99. Bietenholz, *History and Biography* cit., 31-35.

⁷⁰ See above n. 52.

⁷¹ Luigi Firpo, *Lo Stato ideale della Controriforma* (Bari 1957), esp. 241ff.

⁷² François Rabelais, *Gargantua* chs. 52-57.

⁷³ Jean Bodin, *Methodus* cit. 225-28, Mesnard's transl. 427-30; English transl. cit. 296-302.

of imminent doomsday. A famous example is found in the Lenten sermons that Girolamo Savonarola preached in 1491 in Florence; but the end of time was also anticipated in Germany.⁷⁴ It is against this background that the resourceful Abbot Trithemius produced another myth that proved remarkably resistant. When discussing the year 1000 in his earlier *Chronicon Hirsaugiense*, he had not as yet noticed anything untoward. But on second thoughts, in the *Annales Hirsaugienses*, he told a different tale: as the year 1000 approached, amid earthquakes and comets, people were expecting the end of the world.⁷⁵ Trithemius' *Annales* were written between 1509 and 1514 and occasionally consulted in manuscript, but they were not printed until 1690. It is not clear whether he was echoing a thought shared with other contemporaries; at any rate the tale surfaced again in seventeenth-century France. There it was backed up by references to Rodulphus Glaber and other authors alive in 1000 A.D. When we check their comments about the year 1000, they prove irrelevant, however. The contemporaries clearly did not express concern. The point made by the seventeenth-century historians was that fear of doomsday would have inspired an extraordinary generosity towards ecclesiastical institutions, which could explain Glaber's report of a sudden increase of building activity starting in 1003. At the beginning of the eighteenth century the great Mabillon piously repeated the doomsday tale, and so did Jules Michelet more than a century later.⁷⁶

Perhaps more typically, though, the year 1500 meant not so much a fatal cataclysm as rather the promising start of a bright future. Albrecht Dürer commemorated it with a self-portrait famous for its Christ-like features. Inspired by his humanist friends at Nuremberg, he wished to pay tribute to the great work of reconciliation between God and men. At the same time he affirmed his faith in the moral perfectibility of himself and mankind at large.⁷⁷ Even Savonarola, by the middle of the 1490s, often preferred to preach that the inevitable

⁷⁴ Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence. Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance* (Princeton 1970) 66, 93f. and passim. Peuckert, *Die grosse Wende* cit. I 152-57 and passim.

⁷⁵ Lanzoni, *Genesi ... delle leggende* cit. 18, 285f.. Johannes Trithemius, *Tomus I annalium Hirsaugiensium, opus nunquam hactenus editum* (St. Gallen 1690) 143. For the composition and circulation see Arnold, *Johannes Trithemius* cit. 154.

⁷⁶ Jules Roy, *L'An mille. Formation de la légende de l'an mille; état de la France de l'an 950 à l'an 1050* (Paris 1885). McGinn, *Visions of the End* cit. 88-90.

⁷⁷ Dieter Wuttke, "Dürer and Celtis: Von der Bedeutung des Jahres 1500 für den deutschen Humanismus: 'Jahrhundertfeier als symbolische Form'" *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 10 (1980) 73-129, esp. 114.

advent of Antichrist was not the end, but the beginning of a Joachite Fifth Age. From Florence, the new Zion, reform would spread to the corners of the earth.⁷⁸ When the Protestant Reformation got underway, both Savonarola and Joachim of Fiore enjoyed a certain popularity in Germany. With the rejection of Rome, the call for a return to the primitive church of the Apostles spread far and wide, and the myth of the Golden Age Returning could not fail to stir religious emotions. But religious visions apart, the omnipresence of this myth is shown by yet another application. Beginning with the later Middle Ages, we encounter sexual fantasies, which had no precedent in the classical tradition. Some time between 1268 and 1285, Jean de Meun wrote the second part of the *Roman de la Rose* and in the process rediscovered Ovid's Golden Age. To what he had found in Ovid, he added the noticeable feature of his own. He claimed that in those golden days love, like everything else, had been sweet, free and unimpeded by convention. And so it apparently continued, when Jupiter ushered in the Age of Silver and set for all this rule: "*Et s'il set chose qui li plaise / qu'il la face.*" Jean de Meun was echoed three centuries later by Torquato Tasso, who in his *Aminta* (1573) has Nature proclaim: "*S'ei piace, ei lice.*"⁷⁹

Those who felt that in Europe the prospects for a new Golden Age were dim could take comfort from the thought that the original one was alive and well in the New World recently discovered by Columbus. Apparently the first one to use the term "Golden Age," when dwelling on the communism, frugality and natural probity of many native Americans, was the humanist historiographer Pietro Martire d'Anghiera (1457-1526). His report, however, also cited among the natives "cannibals and other felons." While the virtuous natives deserved to be protected, these latter needed to be suppressed.⁸⁰ Half a century later, Michel de Montaigne drew a detailed picture of the life and customs of American cannibals, of whose existence in "*la France antarctique*" he said he had reliable information. Far from damning them, Montaigne found that they had retained the full measure of natural virtues and thus were proof that

⁷⁸ Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence* cit. 28f., 94-97.

⁷⁹ Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*, verses 8355-8454, 9493-9507, 20031-20036, 20095-20099, 20196-20202. Torquato Tasso, *Aminta*; the famous chorus on the Golden Age is at the end of Act I. Cf. Levin, *The Myth of the Golden Age* cit. 24, 34-37, 44-48; Costa, *La leggenda dei secoli d'oro* cit. 98-109.

⁸⁰ Pietro Martire d'Anghiera, *Opera* (Graz 1966) 53 (*De orbe novo decades* 1.3).

real life could surpass not only the poets' visions of the Golden Age, but even the utopias of philosophers. Their dietary customs notwithstanding, these cannibals were "*barbares*" only in the sense that we tend to call barbaric what runs counter to our own customs, and they were "*sauvages*" only in the sense that uncultivated fruits can be called wild.⁸¹ In 1584 Sir Walter Raleigh sent the first of several expeditions to the coast of what is now North Carolina and Virginia. The nascent concept of the noble savage is not to be missed in the report of Raleigh's envoys:

Wee found the people most gentle, loving, and faithfull, void of all guile, and treason, and such as lived after the manner of the golden age. The earth bringeth foorth all things in abundance, as in the first creation, without toile or labour.⁸²

The old myth lives on in the unending chain of dreams about America, the land of justice and freedom, the 'peaceable kingdom.'⁸³ In the America of the Spanish conquerors even the gold was real. Soon the 'Black legend' came to tell of Spanish oppressors and ruthless exploitation of the Indians.⁸⁴ It was, however, not this 'ugly face' of America, but the legacy of ancient myth that proved the most enduring. In 1539 Francisco de Orellana set out from newly-conquered Peru in search of El Dorado, the land of the mountains of gold. What he found was the land of the Amazons. He claimed to have done battle with no fewer than twelve of them, when sailing down the river that still is named for the warrior women of Greek Antiquity.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Michel de Montaigne, *Essais* 1.30, written c. 1580.

⁸² *The Voyage of Philip Amadas and Arthur Barlowe to Virginia* was printed in Richard Hakluyt's *The Principall Navigations* (London 1589). I am quoting from an excerpt in W.P. Cumming, R.A. Skelton and D.B. Quinn, *The Discovery of North America* (Toronto 1971) 200. For the context see also: *First Images of America. The Impact of the New World on the Old*, ed. Fredi Chiappelli et al. (Los Angeles 1976); Hoxie Neale Fairchild, *The Noble Savage. A Study in Romantic Naturalism* (New York 1928); Hugh Honour, *The New Golden Land. Images of America from the Discoveries to the Present* (London 1976); Urs Bitterli, *Die 'Wilden' und die 'Zivilisierten'* (Munich 1976).

⁸³ Edward Hicks (1780-1849) painted the 'peaceable kingdom' up to a hundred times; see Alice Ford, *Edward Hicks. Painter of the Peaceable Kingdom* (Philadelphia 1952) 41 and passim.

⁸⁴ William S. Maltby, *The Black Legend in England. The development of anti-Spanish sentiment, 1558-1660* (Durham, N.C. 1971) 4 and passim.

⁸⁵ Kleinbaum, *The War Against the Amazons* cit. 118-24.

In the final analysis, what can we say about Renaissance attitudes towards the factual and the fictional past? We can see, I think, that they were noticeably different from those of both the preceding and the following periods. In the Middle Ages, historical imagination was usually untrammelled, and little care was taken to distinguish *historia* from *fabula*. Among the best medieval historians a discreet silence will convey a doubt about some incident reported in their sources. Some chroniclers may have refused to repeat what did not seem plausible to them, but the general mood was one of uncritical wonder and awe about the past. Following the Renaissance, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, no striking new myths were created, but a good deal of rational acumen and scholarly ingenuity went into defending some old ones. Heroic battles were waged against a growing sense of scepticism, whether forcefully expressed by bold critics or merely lurking in the author's own mind. While some struck devastating blows against the most venerable historical traditions, others engineered dizzying constructions of the past, which did not defy logic but were unsound in every other way. The mood might be uneasy, confident or even belligerent; yet the Early Modern writers were usually conscious of impending scrutiny and critical objections. In the Renaissance a balance of sorts was struck between mythmaking and incredulity. Imaginative approaches to the past led scholars to discover profound significance in many traditions. The vindication of rhetoric, in opposition to the dialectic of scholasticism, often suggested the preeminence of verbal expression over factual content. At the same time critical dispositions hardened and traditional tales were subjected to rational scrutiny. Vigorous efforts to distinguish between *historia* and *fabula*, and to explore their respective merits, marked the entire period. In short, whether we take Boccaccio's archaic heroes, Erasmus' saints or Maximilian's ancestors, the preceding survey will corroborate what we all know so well about the Renaissance mind: its capacity to be creative and fanciful as well as rational, irreverent as well as pious. The resulting balance is summed up by a remarkable defense of historical intuition in Sir Walter Raleigh's *History of the World* (1614):

Historians do borrow of poets not only much of their ornament, but somewhat of their substance. Informations are often false, records not always true, and notorious actions commonly insufficient to discover the passions which do set them first on foot. ... For he does not feign that rehearses probabilities as bare conjectures, neither does he

deprave the text that seeks to illustrate and make good in human reason those things which authority alone, without further circumstance, ought to have confirmed in every man's belief.⁸⁶

The Renaissance stopped short not only of the scientific revolution but also of the Pyrrhonist revolution of the following age. The correctness of tenets in every field was proved by reference to past authority — Aristotle, Galen, Ptolemy, Quintilian, the Bible, and so on. The earth still was the centre of the physical universe — Copernicus alone could not change that — and earthly man the centre of God's creation. Nor was it different with the historical cosmos of the Renaissance. The Italian Platonists found a kernel of divine truth in every philosophical system. In like manner their contemporaries believed that all — or at any rate, most — characters mentioned by the ancient authors possessed a recoverable core of solid historicity. Once their stories were stripped of all supernatural, miraculous and otherwise irrational elements, an Orpheus, Hermes Trismegistos, Hector and Romulus were simply human beings and as such unquestionably historical. Exceptionally, the same could be assumed of a character like Tell, although no well-known author had vouched for him. Even though some scholars might have their doubts, there was no need to agonize over the momentous 'discoveries' of Annius and Trithemius. Particular facets of the human past were assiduously recovered, but more than ever before and after, the past was experienced as an organic whole. Renaissance men could see eye to eye with their most distant ancestors, because human nature had always been the same. Mankind did not change; therefore historians, as Sir Walter Raleigh put it, could always "make good in human reason those things which authority alone ... ought to have confirmed."

Since human nature did not change, human history was bound to move in recurrent cycles. Acquaintance with man's action in the past would serve to guide one's present conduct and even to predict the future. The usefulness of examples was taken for granted. As *vitae magistra*, history was most effective when focussing on the actions of exceptional individuals. Renaissance humanists were more than willing to turn from general precepts to particular exemplars. While Raleigh's dictum shows that Aristotle's famous inquiry into the respective merits of history and poetry stubbornly continued to exercise the minds, this

⁸⁶ Sir Walter Raleigh, *The History of the World* 1.2.21.6.

ongoing debate remained sterile until well into the eighteenth century. Rather than contributing to the growth of a critical method, it eventually owed a certain revitalization to the progress of historicism.⁸⁷ That progress, however, was greatly impeded by the predominant perception of history as a treasure house of examples. While examples derived from factual history were owed a special distinction, in the end it hardly mattered whether or not the exemplary action had actually happened — or only been invented. Either way, it could teach valuable lessons.⁸⁸ George Nadel has pointed out how keen the appetite for examples remained throughout the entire Early Modern Age; without it, historicist concepts might have spread more quickly.⁸⁹ In particular, Reinhart Koselleck argues, the preoccupation with examples obstructed the “temporalization” of historical thinking.⁹⁰ We shall soon have occasion to note the concerted efforts of early modern chronologers, who laboured to arm historical thought with precisely that temporal dimension that the reliance on examples tended to neglect.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Aristotle, *Poetica* 9.1-3.1451a-b, 23.1-4.1459b. Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time*, transl. K. Tribe (Cambridge, Mass. 1985) 213-18. George H. Nadel, “Philosophy of History before Historicism,” first printed in 1964, repr. in *History and Theory* 3 (1964) 291-315 and in *Studies in the Philosophy of History*, ed. G.H. Nadel (New York 1965) 49-73, here 51f. Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, transl. E.M. Sinclair (Oxford 1936) 85f.

⁸⁸ Aristotle, in *Rhetorica* 2.19f.1393a-1394a; cf. 1.2.1357a-b., distinguished between examples that had actually occurred in the past and others, less useful ones, that were merely invented. As far as I can see, the sixteenth and seventeenth-century writers on historical theory failed to follow his lead. Such is the case with Jean Bodin’s *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem* ch. 3, ed. Mesnard cit. 121-24. Francis Bacon, *De augmentis scientiarum* 8 aphorismi 21-31, in *The Works* ed. J. Spedding et al., 3rd ed (London 1870) I 808-10, V 92-94. Factual examples of history are combined with a “feigned case” in Bacon’s *Advertisement Touching on Holy War* in *The Works* cit. VII 32f. In the twelfth century John of Salisbury also did not seem to think that factuality was of great concern in examples; see Peter von Moos, “The use of *exempla* in the *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury” in *The World of John of Salisbury* ed. Michael Wilks (Oxford 1984) 207-62, here 222-24.

⁸⁹ Nadel, “Philosophy of History Before Historicism” cit. For corroborating evidence see Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* cit. 81-83.

⁹⁰ Koselleck, *Futures Past* cit. 5, 21-38 and passim.

⁹¹ See below pp. 224-27.

CHAPTER SIX

OLD TESTAMENT SCHOLARSHIP IN THE EARLY MODERN AGE

I

Outline of the Age

We must now move our investigation forward to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a period that is often labelled “Early Modern” and treated as a unit since, on balance, continuity and uniform development would seem to prevail. On the other hand, a turning point is reached by the end of the eighteenth century, when new political and economic structures begin to dominate European history. The Early Modern Age is usually credited with the beginnings of historicism, that is to say, the ability to judge past societies by their own standards rather than those of the observer and to understand past events in their bewilderingly intricate relationships to one another rather than in simplistic isolation. The prerequisite for a historicist world view is a comprehensive method of historical study, which involves constant ascertaining of the correctness of the facts on record. Thus, if the Middle Ages had been characterized by unfettered fabulizing and the Renaissance by a balance between rational critique and historical invention, it might be expected that Early Modern Age would bring about the denouement, the systematic distinction of *fabula* and *historia*. While progress in this direction did continually occur, it was not unimpeded. To do the period justice, we shall have to travel blind alleys as well as the avenues of progress. Indeed, we shall have to wander through curious labyrinths, where a variety of partial advances obstructed and delayed progress. In the end the breakthrough did occur and myth was recognized to be an autonomous source of historical information, independent of factual history and able to afford powerful insights.

In keeping with the advance of historical scholarship, arguments of considerable sophistication were introduced into the discussion. To do the Early Modern period justice, we must be prepared for intricate debate and minutiae of a kind that could be largely avoided in the

preceding parts of this survey. When examining the developments that will concern us in the next three chapters, it may be helpful to distinguish four major currents. The limits of their catchment areas are hard to determine, yet their course remains traceable and will lend profile to the progress of our investigation, especially in this chapter.

1. Advances in scholarship which may be termed neutral in the sense that they were achieved by a thorough knowledge of the sources and keen textual criticism, without a concomitant inclination to offer an interpretation and either attack or defend traditional views. The sober results of research put forward in this manner, nevertheless, could not be ignored by those who felt called upon to either debunk tradition or come to its rescue.

2. The progress of *fabula*. A fascinating development in this period is the vigorous presentation of arguments and theories intended to offer new interpretations of tradition-hallowed tales that were now found to defy the laws of nature or of logic. Here tradition were not simply to be rejected. In highly sophisticated reworkings of the old Euhemeristic approach, the seemingly irrational was to be given a rational, albeit often unreasonable or at least implausible, explanation. Occasionally the same rational packaging also served for new products of the imagination.

3. The progressive elimination of myths and legends from the body of factual history. By the end of this period, a vastly superior understanding of the complexities of both history and myth had been achieved, and the modern science of mythology could begin to create its autonomous methodological base. It could, moreover, be enlisted together with history to gain a comprehensive picture of the human past.

4. The conservative tradition. For many contemporaries, old-fashioned views of the past were too meaningful to be surrendered to the modern "Pyrrhonistic" debunkers. In some cases bold new concepts needed a safe anchorage in more traditional views.

As was the case in preceding chapters, the following investigation must be restricted to a very few of the many relevant topics. Altogether three fields have been selected. The current chapter will deal with the Old Testament, whose importance in our context is second to none. The origins of Rome and the New Testament will be examined in the following chapters, so as to permit conclusions on a comparative basis. The choice in this case may be rather less arbitrary than was the pick of topics in previous sections. Throughout the Early

Modern Age religion remained a capital issue, and a great many problems, including scientific ones, continued to be studied with frequent side-glances at the religious implications they might raise. Ancient Rome too remained a topic of absorbing interest. While many scholars, the French in particular, continued to research their national origins, and while fascination with China and other far-away nations was steadily growing, the prestige of Rome was unique. No other empire could match the Roman in size and in importance for the development of Europe. Also, it was not until the eighteenth century that Latin, the language of Rome, was decisively losing ground as the idiom of scholars and diplomats. The peculiar problem of the origins of Rome was born with the Early Modern period, so to speak — the first monograph on the topic appeared in 1589¹ — and has never since lost its fascination.

II

The 'Neutral' Study of the Old Testament

The interpretation of Scripture, along both traditional and innovative lines, was bound to take account of what we have termed “neutral” advances of scholarship. The most significant of these occurred in the study of oriental languages, above all Hebrew. In the Middle Ages the Hebrew language had found few serious students outside the secluded Jewish world.² Hebrew scholarship became a regular part of the Western cultural heritage thanks to the initiative of Renaissance humanists. In Italy printing in Hebrew characters began in 1477 or earlier. By 1504 Elia Levita, the leading Jewish grammarian of his age, arrived in Padua and began to inspire the first generation of Christian Hebraists. In 1506 Johann Reuchlin published his pioneering

¹ Ottaviano Ferrari (1518-86), *De origine Romanorum liber* (Pavia 1589), repeatedly reprinted; cf. Hendrik Johannes Erasmus, *The Origins of Rome in Historiography from Petrarch to Perizonius* (Assen [1962]) 48f., a doctoral dissertation in the University of Leiden.

² *The Legacy of Israel*, ed. Edwyn R. Bevan and Charles Singer (Oxford 1927) 305-24, and *Encyclopaedia Judaica* VIII (Jerusalem 1971) 9-71: “Hebraists, Christian (1100-1890),” both also for what follows here.

Hebrew grammar-cum-dictionary.³ The Protestant Reformation took a lead in establishing Hebrew as a prerequisite for preaching based on Scripture and thus for the exercise of the ministry. Protestant universities like Basel, Leiden and Oxford became leading centres of Hebrew scholarship, but Catholic contributions like the Complutensian Polyglot Bible (1514-22) and the Antwerp Royal Polyglot (1569-72) were likewise significant.⁴

In the early seventeenth century Hebrew scholars were engrossed in an issue that holds a special interest for our subject. This debate concerned the vocalization signs found in manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible. As the Hebrew alphabet is composed of consonants only, the meaning of many words and sentences will depend on what unwritten vowels are to be supplemented. In the fifth and sixth centuries a system of dots to connote the vowels was invented and applied to the Old Testament canon by the Masoretic school of rabbis. Beginning with the first generation of protestant reformers, some Christian scholars questioned the age and authoritative character of the vowel signs. Eventually their late, rabbinic origins were convincingly demonstrated by Louis Cappel, a professor at the Huguenot academy of Saumur. Cappel's *Arcanum punctuationis revelatum* (Leiden 1624) should have settled the issue, but the controversy continued. In fact, accepting Cappel's findings only led to a more profound dilemma. Theologians everywhere, but especially Calvinists, needed a scriptural canon of undisputable authority, a reliable text that could be presented as the basis of their doctrines. That was what the Masoretes too had desired and had attempted to provide. But the Masoretes were accursed Jews of the Christian era. Could their work, nevertheless, have been directed by the Holy Spirit? Although this controversy was conducted among learned Hebraists, it would ultimately benefit those who were ready to ask questions about the authenticity of "God's Word."⁵

Another, and wider, issue, directly related to the controversy over Hebrew vocalization, had also been under debate from the time of Erasmus and Luther. How much weight should be given to the

³ *The Cambridge History of the Bible* ed. S.L. Greenslade (Cambridge 1963-70) III 44-46, 49.

⁴ *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. Greenslade cit. III 47, 54f. Federico Perez Castro and Leon Voet, *La Biblia poliglota de Amberes* (Madrid 1973).

⁵ Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments von der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart* 3rd ed. (Neukirchen 1982) 47-50 and passim.

Hebrew Old Testament in comparison with the Greek Septuagint translation? The Latin Vulgate was based on Jerome's translation of the canon from Hebrew but also retained certain non-canonical books translated from the Septuagint, which the protestants promptly excluded from their Old Testaments. Cappel argued in favour of the Hebrew text. It had, he submitted, continually been improved by the Jewish scholars so that, even in Christ's time, it was more authentic than it had been three hundred years earlier, when it served as the basis for the Septuagint translation. The canon, as established by the Masoretes, had authority. Cappel registered no less than 1826 variants between the Hebrew and Greek versions and even attempted some reconstructions of the unknown Hebrew originals translated by the Seventy nearly a thousand years before the Masoretic Hebrew canon had come into existence. His arguments were in part directed against the Oratorian Jean Morin (1591-1659), who opposed the protestant reliance on the Hebrew text. Morin maintained that the Septuagint was superior and must remain normative, especially in view of the fact that the Masoretic text recorded all essential precepts in conformity with it. He was even prepared to suggest that in some places the Jewish doctors had tampered with their own Bible in order to confound the Christian readers. Behind the strictly philological issue of textual transmission there loomed again the fundamental question whether all of Scripture was wholly inspired by the Holy Spirit, in which case *fabula* could have no part in it.⁶

The chronological indications of the Old Testament were likewise subjected to 'neutral' inquiry. Not only were discrepancies noticed between the Jewish and Samaritan Hebrew versions and the Greek Septuagint, serious inconsistencies were also found to occur between various passages of the same version. This was particularly unfortunate because the Old Testament was expected to supply the standard against which all of ancient history needed to be checked. In his magisterial *Opus de emendatione temporum* (1583), Joseph Justus Scaliger showed that despite the uncontested pre-eminence of sacred

⁶ Louis Cappel, *Critica sacra sive de variis quae in sacris Veteris Testamenti libris occurrunt lectionibus libri sex, in quibus ex variarum lectionum observatione quamplurima S. Scripturae loca explicantur, illustrantur atque adeo emendantur non pauca* (Paris 1650), Preface and 443ff. Jean Morin's title is equally programmatic: *Exercitationes biblicae de Hebraei Graecique textus sinceritate germana LXXII interpretum translatione dignoscenda, illius cum Vulgata conciliatione et iuxta Iudaeos divina integritate, totiusque Rabbinicae antiquitatis et operis Masorethici aerae explicatione et censura* (Paris 1633); see e.g. 13-30, 249. *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. Greenslade cit. III 217-22.

history, the Old Testament was not of itself capable of supplying a coherent chronology of mankind's early rulers and societies. To make sense of such dates as Scripture provided, one had to turn to the astronomers and secular historians of the ancient world for supplementary information.⁷ Above all, a system was needed to co-ordinate the diverse points in time, for time itself was measured in a great variety of ways. Scaliger's new system, the principal result of his chronological studies, will occupy us later.⁸ It was revolutionary in that it did away with a fixed and necessarily speculative initial date such as the Creation, the Deluge or the foundation of Rome, all of which were located in prehistoric twilight. Where Scaliger prevailed, such obscure events were no longer indispensable for the construction of a chronological framework, whether biblical or secular.

Scaliger did not question the Creation and the Deluge; he neither challenged nor defended *historia sacra* but rather strove to provide its students with a series of chronological keys. In conclusion of one such examination he wrote:

Therefore, good reader, you can learn from Ezekiel [1.1-2; cf. 2 Kings 24.12] that the thirteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar was the thirtieth of another king who ruled Chaldaea at the same time. Anyone endowed with some judgement will concede that two kings will never rule together, unless they are father and son. Moreover, it stands to reason that the one whose regnal time is the longer must be the father. Therefore the thirtieth year relates to the time of Nebuchadnezzar's father. But who will teach us the name of that father? Well, Berossus is on hand to identify Nabopolassar... This is sufficient to clarify the passage in Ezekiel, and thus we have established that in the eighteenth year of his father's reign the son has been appointed co-ruler. But what more? Who can tell me when this actually happened? Here Ptolemy has the answer, for he tells us that Nabopolassar's first year fell into the hundred-and-twenty-third of [the epoch beginning with the first] Thot of Nabonassar, a date that Scaliger had earlier established as 747 B.C.⁹

⁷ Scaliger was not the first chronologer to interpret biblical dates with the help of ancient astronomers and historians; see Grafton, *Defenders of the Text* cit. 104-44, esp. 120-28.

⁸ See below p. 273f.

⁹ Josephus Justus Scaliger, *Opus de emendatione temporum ... ex auctoris ipsius manuscripto ... auctius. Addita veterum Graecorum fragmenta ... cum notis eiusdem Scaligeri* (Geneva 1629) appendix 23; cf. 391f., 398f. See Anthony T. Grafton, "Joseph Scaliger and Historical Chronology: The Rise and Fall of a Discipline" *History and Theory* 14 (1975) 156-85, esp. 168f.

Throughout *De emendatione temporum* Scaliger maintained that indications of time in the Old Testament and in secular historians could serve to corroborate each other. But it was not given him to let matters rest at this comfortable view he had taken in 1583. In 1606 he published his *Thesaurus temporum*; by then he had immersed himself in the complicated problems created by Manetho's list of 31 Egyptian dynasties — a list Scaliger could know only from secondary sources. The flawed text apart, the difficulty was that the three to four thousand years usually allocated for the period from Creation to Christ were grossly insufficient to accommodate the Egyptian dynasties. The problem was not new. In the early fourth century Eusebius of Caesarea had recognized it and decided rather casually that Manetho's years were lunar years, which really meant just months, and that several dynasties might have ruled simultaneously in different cities of Egypt.¹⁰ In 1569 Gerhard Mercator dealt with it by squeezing sixteen dynasties into the space between the Creation and the Flood.¹¹ After Scaliger, Gerardus Vossius (1577-1649) was particularly successful in advancing the facile solution of parallel dynasties, and even Isaac Newton would combine parallel dynasties with an unwarranted reduction of Egyptian solar years to lunar ones.¹² Scaliger, however, was not prepared to throw honest scholarship to the winds. His critical examination had turned up no reason by which to fault Manetho's information; therefore it must not be manipulated. But if Manetho was not open to doubt, then the Pentateuch was. Good Christian that he was, Scaliger unhappily decided that he must remain neutral. Egypt seemed to have flourished before the Creation and the beginning of time. The matter was paradoxical and seemingly absurd, but he could not help it.

Like Vossius and Newton, many subsequent scholars preferred traditional solutions and turned a blind eye to Scaliger's dilemma. Richard Simon (1638-1712) concurred with Scaliger that no sensible chronology could be worked out on the basis of the Old Testament,

¹⁰ Eusebius, *Chronicorum libri duo* 1.20f., ed. Schoene cit. I. 134-37.

¹¹ Gerhard Mercator, *Chronologia* (Cologne 1569) 5, 8.

¹² Grafton, "Joseph Scaliger and Historical Chronology" cit. 170-73. Donald J. Wilcox, *The Measure of Time Past. Pre-Newtonian Chronologies and the Rhetoric of Relative Time* (Chicago 1987) 196-214. Paul Hazard, *The European Mind (1680-1715)*, transl. J.L. May (London 1953) 40-48. Gerardus Vossius, *De theologia gentili et psychologia christiana* (Amsterdam 1641). Isaac Newton, *Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms Amended* (London 1728). See also Walter Raleigh, *The History of the World* 1.2.2.2-3, and the long articles on "Chronologie" and "Chronologie sacrée" in the *Encyclopédie*, ed. D. Diderot et al. (Paris 1751-80).

but he also argued that the Christian religion could well do without one, and he never bothered to assign dates. In the end it was, however, not the self-sufficiency of the Christian religion, but the concept of a pristine age of myth that halted the application of historical chronology to prehistoric times. To Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) the whole approach of Scaliger and his likes was wrong-headed. They worried about astronomical years with regard to men who had lived up to a thousand years before astronomy was ever heard of.¹³ By the time that Jean-François Champollion (1790-1832) solved the riddle of the Egyptian hieroglyphics, the priority of the Egyptian over the Jewish civilization was no longer in doubt.

The scholars of Early Modern Europe submitted themselves wholeheartedly to the spell of historical documents (*acta, monumenta, Urkunden*). Chronicles and similar narratives offered nothing but interpretations; they incorporated traditions that were bound to be murky and untrustworthy. Documents, on the other hand, would speak for themselves and speak the truth. Scaliger and also the great Hugo Grotius searched the Old Testament in a philological quest for factual evidence — and often had to look hard for it. Research of this kind could, and perhaps had to, be conducted at a safe distance from the mysteries of the faith revealed in Scripture. Jean Bolland (1596-1665) and Jean Mabillon (1632-1707), with their Jesuit and Benedictine fellow-scholars, extended the search for documentary evidence to the history of the church and its saints, choosing for their publications such titles as *Acta sanctorum*, *Vetera analecta* and *De re diplomatica*. Two books, separated by two centuries, can serve to mark the rise and waning of this first age of diplomatics. Andreas Masius' *Iosua* (1574), a book by a Catholic, but controversial enough to appear at once on the Roman Index, forcefully argued that the whole Pentateuch and much else in the historical books of the Old Testament represented a very late redaction of personal records and early annals. As faint echoes of the original records these texts were open to criticism and

¹³ Richard Simon, *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* (Rotterdam 1685, repr. 1967) 5, 38, 207-10. Giambattista Vico, *La Scienza nuova seconda giusta l'edizione del 1744*, ed. Fausto Nicolini (Bari 1928) II § 740. Nicolini's division into paragraphs has been retained in the English translation by T.G. Bergin and M.H. Fisch (Ithaca, N.Y. 1948). For Simon and Vico see below pp. 229f., 251-53.

conjecture.¹⁴ Johann Gottfried Herder's *Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts* (1774-76), on the other hand, restored to the Old Testament the prestigious qualification of documentary record. It was indeed an *Urkunde*;¹⁵ not one to pinpoint chronological progression, however, but a marvellous guide book, written in the pristine, mythical language of youthful mankind, profoundly true and universally comprehensible, because it spoke straight to the heart. And why should it not be divinely inspired? Herder could no longer authenticate the Pentateuch as a historical document by believing in its literal truth. For scholars like him, mythology offered a way to save their faith in inspiration. The Old Testament was a record of men and women to whom God had spoken loud and clear.¹⁶

Masius' *Iosua* was also a landmark in another development that could be traced back to Erasmus but did not become fully profiled until the seventeenth century, namely the shift from *Heilsgeschichte* to *Redaktionsgeschichte*. Apart from being an inspired source of revelation and salvation, the Old Testament needed also to be studied as the history of a complicated process of redaction, involving diverse authors and editors over a space of many centuries. From Erasmus and Luther onwards, suspicions had been expressed sporadically that not all books of the scriptural canon had been authored by the man whose name was given in the title. Luther had questioned — rather casually, it is true — whether Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah were solely responsible for the books that bore their names. Erasmus had serious doubts about Paul's authorship of Hebrews and Peter's of 2 Peter.¹⁷ Especially for the historical and prophetic books of the Old Testament it was assumed with growing frequency that scribes and editors had been involved. Masius pursued this approach in his *Iosua*,

¹⁴ Kraus, *Geschichte ... des Alten Testaments* cit. 38-40, also for the following. Hazard, *The European Mind* cit. 48-51.

¹⁵ A few years later Johann Gottfried Eichhorn saw in the Old Testament the "*Urkunde* of man's rational religion." The term *Urkunde* recurs constantly in his work; see below pp. 256-58. While common in current German, the term retains a slight connotation of great antiquity and is therefore more solemn than the English 'document.'

¹⁶ For Herder see also below pp. 255f., 280f.

¹⁷ Kraus, *Geschichte ... des Alten Testaments* cit. 16. *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi*, ed. Allen cit. IV Epp. 1112:49-52, 1171:6-10; cf. Ep. 1181; Erasmus, LB VI 1068. Erasmus' acumen was primarily directed to the New Testament, which he had translated and edited; but with typical discretion and ambiguity he called the account of Creation "*mysticam Mosis narrationem*," while other tales of the Pentateuch reminded him of "*fabula*" and "*poeticum ... figmentum*." See Erasmus, LB V 29, 561.

setting new standards of scholarly circumspection.¹⁸ According to Masius, Joshua was an *imperator*, a great leader to his people, not a scribe. The one to compile the book of Joshua, and also other books, such as Judges and Kings, had probably been Ezra. This hypothesis proved attractive; it was taken up, among others, by Spinoza and Richard Simon. On the other hand, Jean Le Clerc adroitly noted on one occasion that the Samaritans too possessed Deuteronomy, which clearly belonged to the same tradition as Josuah, Judges, Samuel and Kings. The Samaritans, however, had broken communion with the other Jews well over two centuries before Ezra's time.¹⁹

Richard Simon's *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* (1678) is among the most influential works of 'neutral' scholarship.²⁰ The author was a brilliant scholar and writer. Until his expulsion from the congregation, he had given lustre to the Paris house of the Oratorians; thereafter he ended his life as a modest *curé* of Bolleville in Normandy. The *Histoire critique* had already been approved for publication by the appropriate authorities and indeed printed, when the formidable Bossuet got to see it and caused the censors to reverse their judgement. Bossuet could not, however, prevent Simon's work being widely disseminated in new editions, for the most part unauthorized. Although diffuse in detail, the *Histoire critique* has a clear and interesting structure. The first part deals with the Hebrew text, examining problems and methods of textual criticism and even attempting to give a history of the composition and transmission. The second part reviews a great many translations of the Old Testament from the Septuagint to recent vernacular versions. The third part mostly looks at a variety of commentators, Jewish, Catholic and protestant. The other biblical scholars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had written in Latin; by using French, Simon wished to make their findings, together with his own, more broadly accessible. It is in this third part that he best succeeds in his stance as a severe,

¹⁸ The book of Joshua is offered as parallel text juxtaposing the Hebrew and Greek, each with its own Latin translation. The Vulgate text is given at the bottom of the page. Marginals refer to the Chaldaic text wherever it differs from the Hebraic. The volume further included a historical commentary and copious notes by Masius as well as indexes.

¹⁹ Andreas Masius, *Iosuae imperatoris historia illustrata atque explicata* (Antwerp 1574) [II] 2. Jean Le Clerc, *Sentimens de quelques théologiens de Hollande sur ... Simon* (Amsterdam 1685) 122f. Cf. Kraus, *Geschichte ... des Alten Testaments* cit. 71.

²⁰ For the following cf. Jean Steinmann, *Richard Simon et les origines de l'exégèse biblique* (Bruges 1960); Hazard, *The European Mind* cit. 180-97; Kraus, *Geschichte ... des Alten Testaments* cit. 65-70 and passim.

but evenhanded critic, which helped his work to gain approval among protestant scholars. The *Histoire critique* is visibly linked to another project dear to Simon's heart. The superior, inter-confessional French translation of the Old Testament, in which he had hoped to collaborate, however, was never undertaken.²¹ The *Histoire critique* really was a comprehensive guide to the critical apparatus that editors and translators of the Bible text needed to master. Since Simon's business ostensibly was not with the sacred text itself but with an ancillaries thereof, he could calmly bring about the decisive change. To him the Old Testament was no longer history, and sacred history at that, but an object of historical investigation. It was not the authentic Word of God, but the handiwork of inspired and conscientious scribes.²² A critical examination of the canon revealed several levels of composition, with the oldest, that of the original authors like Moses, practically beyond the reach of the modern investigator. Although Simon was never one to hold back with criticism of other Catholic scholars, the *Histoire critique* also had the prominent task of justifying his church to non-Catholic readers, as this would legitimate his undertaking to Catholic ones. It was true that contemporary Calvinist scholars and, worse, the 'libertin' Spinoza were using the same critical method that he himself employed to combat them. Scholarship itself was neutral; it could serve an evil cause as well as a holy one. Since the biblical texts were not authentically transmitted, the protestant principle of *sola Scriptura* did not make sense. Christians must be guided by the expository tradition, on which even Christ himself had relied when quoting Genesis.²³ Because it embodied that tradition, the Catholic church, anchor of salvation, alone was authorized to interpret Scripture.

The distinction between two strands of Pentateuch texts, using for God the terms of Yahweh and Elohim respectively, is normally presented as the great achievement of Jean Astruc (1684-1766).

²¹ Steinmann, *Richard Simon* cit. 91-96.

²² E.g. [Richard Simon], *De l'Inspiration des livres sacrés: avec une réponse au livre intitulé, Défense des Sentimens de quelques theologiens de Hollande sur l'Histoire critique du Vieux Testament. Par le Prieur de Bolleville* (Rotterdam 1687) 3 : "Toute l'écriture a esté inspirée de Dieu." C'est aussi le sentiment commun des Juifs et des Chrestiens. Mais il ne faut pas sous pretexte de cette inspiration, combattre la raison et l'expérience. Ce sont des hommes qui ont esté les instrumens de Dieu." Only Muslims are simple enough to think that their Quran was written in Heaven and carried down to earth by the Angel Gabriel.

²³ [Simon], *Réponse au livre ...*, appended to *De l'Inspiration* cit. 80-108.

Whether or not he had any forerunners,²⁴ Astruc's *Conjectures sur ... Moïse*,²⁵ exemplary for the logical precision and clear presentation of his arguments, certainly was a landmark. The detachment and objectivity he brought to his endeavour may in part be explained by personal circumstances. Astruc was a royal physician and enjoyed an outstanding reputation as medical teacher and author. His single excursion into the field of biblical scholarship may have owed something to his upbringing. A Catholic from childhood, he was the son of a one-time Huguenot pastor and descended of a family that originally may have been Jewish. In Astruc's view, Moses was the prototype of "scissors-and-paste historians" (to borrow Collingwood's term). When Moses set out to reconstruct the beginnings of human history, he had before him no less than twelve separate records, of which the Yahwist and the Elohist were by far the most important and comprehensive. Half of Astruc's book is taken up by a reconstruction of these two major documents, presented in parallel columns. His reconstruction covers Genesis and the first two chapters of Exodus. It could not be complete, of course, for in piecing his account together from various segments, Moses had omitted many pieces that were wholly repetitive. Astruc based his reconstruction on the Geneva French Bible, since it was the only translation to render the two references to God in uniform and consistent fashion. As Astruc pointed out, his fragment theory explained the presence of two and more accounts of the same events that might differ in some aspects and be more or less identical in others. It also accounted for what he called "*antichronismes*," overlaps in the chronological order. Despite his many pertinent observations, Astruc's general conclusion was the traditional, and mistaken, one. After the first chapters of Exodus, he argued, Moses described for the most part events he had himself experienced and thus no longer needed written records. In his single departure from a neutral position, Astruc took issue with Spinoza and Le Clerc for denying Moses' authorship of the Pentateuch. They were supporting their claims with the seeming lack of order in the

²⁴ Kraus, *Geschichte ... des Alten Testaments* cit. 95. Kraus is among those attributing the discovery to Hennig Bernhard Witter, pastor at Hildesheim, who wrote in 1711.

²⁵ [Jean Astruc], *Conjectures sur les mémoires originaux dont il paroît que Moïse s'est servi pour composer le Livre de la Genèse* (Brussels 1753), anonymously published.

presentation of Genesis. But Genesis was not disorderly; rather the “*esprits-forts*” had failed to understand its arrangement.²⁶

III

The Progress of Fabula

In the seventeenth century curious new flowers kept sprouting all over *Fabula*'s garden. Some of the most intriguing elucidations were owed to Old Testament scholarship. Those who produced them were, indeed, scholars and often very fine ones, whose 'neutral' achievements did not lag behind some others discussed in the preceding section. The Old Testament, of course, was unique. It was a sacred, inspired book and yet replete with tales that baffled any reasonable mind. What was one to think of the snake talking to Eve, the parting of the Red Sea, the ass rebuking Balaam and many other occurrences no less puzzling than these? One might, of course, declare that these were authentic miracles, but in the Old Testament this explanation often was less compelling than in the New, which reported some extraordinary actions by Christ himself and, above all, his resurrection. Was it really necessary for God to cause a snake or a donkey to speak? Such passages cried out for ingenious explanations, respectfully conscious of the inherent truth of God's Word, but also consistent with human reason. To illustrate this peculiar direction of learned pursuits, we might look at the work of four representative scholars.

Samuel Bochart (1599-1667) was the son of a Huguenot pastor and himself spent most of his life ministering to the Huguenot congregation of Caen. The one adventure of his life was a journey to Sweden, 1652-53, undertaken at the invitation of Queen Christina, who wished to meet the author of the *Geographia sacra*. The book was indeed famous and proved influential. It was based on a peculiar theory about the information available with regard to the oldest human tribes and their migrations. Bochart believed that such information

²⁶ [Astruc], *Conjectures sur ... Moyse* cit. 14, 431-95. The attacks on Le Clerc are justified only in part.

could best be derived from geographical names, which in turn would often reflect the name of a founder or a leader. The sources he proposed to study were familiar ones — one was Genesis 10, the other Graeco-Roman geographical literature —; but the study itself, apart from being expert and thorough, broke new ground. On the theory that the earliest sources were the purest, Bochart argued that none was more reliable than Moses, whose knowledge had been obtained from all the written and oral traditions of his time and, above all, by divine revelation.²⁷ Now in Genesis 10 and 11.5-9, Moses reported the names of his descendants and also their dispersion after the building of the Tower of Babel and the confusion of language. In the first part of the *Geographia sacra* Bochart undertook to explain their resettlement. They had been scattered, he believed, throughout the Near and Middle East, and some even beyond the Black and Caspian Seas and as far away as Spain. The Greek and Roman geographers were less reliable than Moses; therefore their accounts had to be tested against the Old Testament.

In the second part of the *Geographia sacra* Bochart moved on to the great object of his scholarly passion, the Phoenicians and their language still shrouded in mystery.²⁸ He believed that the settlement of Israel in the Promised Land predated the Greek ascendancy by many centuries. After Moses' death, Canaan was conquered under Joshua's leadership, and the Phoenicians were expelled from their homeland along the litoral between Tyre and Byblos. Plying the seas in search of new abodes, they carried the heritage they shared with Israel through most of the ancient world and, in particular, to the shores of Hellas and Rome. Much of this legacy, in miserably distorted form, was reflected in the "fables" of Graeco-Roman mythology, but fortunately geographical names had fared better. Bochart assumed, quite correctly, that many names reported by the ancient geographers were originally Phoenician. He recognized and demonstrated that the Phoenician language was closely related to Hebrew — today both are classified as north-central Semitic languages. Bochart had no knowledge of the scant Phoenician inscriptions that have come to light since his day, but he realized that some Phoenician (Punic) words occurred in classical texts. Plautus'

²⁷ Samuel Bochart, *Geographiae sacrae pars prior: Phaleg seu de dispersione gentium et terrarum divisione facta in aedificatione turris Babel* (Caen 1646), preface.

²⁸ For earlier interest in the Phoenicians, e.g. on the part of Daniel Heinsius (1580/81-1655), see Erasmus, *The Origins of Rome* cit. 99-101.

Poenulus, for instance, contains several lines in the Punic version of the Phoenician language. He carefully gathered these Phoenician words and ventured to explain their meaning in the light of Hebrew analogies.

Although Bochart, like most of his contemporaries, continued to see the Old Testament as a compendium of universal history, he set relatively little store by the worn-out myths of Noah's well-travelled offspring, trivialized by generations of eager genealogists. Instead, he concentrated on a more scholarly kind of speculation. In the place of the traditional *historia sacra*, he studied *geographia sacra*, discovering the Hebrew-Phoenician roots of place names throughout the ancient world. In this undertaking he was guided by analogies of either sound or meaning in different languages. But scholarly advances notwithstanding, his labours ultimately were an offering to *fabula*. To give some examples, Bochart was correct in explaining Lisbon (Olisipo, Ulisippo); the name was Phoenician, *alis ubbo*, and meant 'pleasant gulf.' To connect it with Ulysses and his travels, as was often done, was nonsense. On the other hand, his identification of a great-grandson of Noah, whose name was Dodanim, according to the Vulgate (Genesis 10.4), with Rhodanus, the river Rhone, and related place names on either side of the Pyrenees must now seem absurd. It was supported merely by an "ancient" reading — Rhodanim in the place of Dodanim — that Bochart claimed to have found.²⁹ He was likewise correct in showing that ancient Babylon was not identical with modern Baghdad and that the Babylonian god Belus (in Greek sources) was the biblical Baal.³⁰ But then the premise of biblical priority had the better, and he concluded that Herodotus' temple of Zeus Belus in Babylon — eight towers superimposed on one another with the sanctuary on top and a spiral ramp wound around all eight — was a distorted echo of the biblical Tower of Babel. In reality, the biblical myth may well be a distorted reflection of the Babylonian ziggurat temple, while Herodotus' account has a good chance of being accurate. For good measure, Bochart suggested that Babylon had been founded by Belus rather than Semiramis, and Belus, the king subsequently worshipped as a god, was none other than Nimrod, a son of Cush and great-grandson of Noah, who according to Moses had migrated to Babylon. Nimrod, however, was also Bacchus, for in

²⁹ Bochart, *Geographia sacra* cit. I 183f. ,II 695f.

³⁰ Bochart, *Geographia sacra* cit. 36-40, II 786, 850.

Hebrew-Phoenician *bar-Chus* meant 'son of Chus,' while Nimra was the Chaldaean name for the Tigris.³¹ In the same vein, Bochart provided an elaborate series of proofs that Saturn was really Noah.³²

We shall return to Bochart's Phoenician studies when dealing with the prehistory of Rome;³³ right now we shall look at another dissertation on the Tower of Babel. Its author, Athanasius Kircher (1602-80), was a polymath in the true spirit of his time. His publications ranged from optics, magnetism and geology to antiquarian studies, acoustics, music, linguistics and logic. He was a Jesuit and, in addition to the fruits of his own immense learning, benefited from information imparted by his fellow-Jesuits from various corners of the world. Perhaps his most significant work in the long run, the *China monumentis...illustrata* (1667), owed its value largely to the excellence of such information and, in particular, the drawings provided by Johann Grueber, S.J., while Kircher himself contributed his abstruse theories. What the Phoenicians had been to Bochart, the Egyptians were to Kircher. He devoted several monographs to ancient Egyptian and Coptic topics. He was confident that he had solved the riddle of the Hieroglyphics and ever willing to provide translations. Obelisks were then becoming fashionable, and in 1665-66 Gianlorenzo Bernini created in Rome the monument in front of S. Maria sopra Minerva, placing a small obelisk upon an elephant sculpture. Typically, this obelisk was engraved with a sober statement of provenance, but Kircher interpreted the inscription as a veritable theogony and translated it in terms of muddled metaphysics. In other Hieroglyphic inscriptions he found echoes of the Christian Trinity. Even the Chinese characters he ventured to trace back to the stylized pictorial writing of ancient Egypt.³⁴

For the greater part of his life Kircher was in Rome, but his *Turris Babel* (1679), like the *China monumentis...illustrata* and most of his later works were published in Amsterdam. An attractive feature

³¹ Herodotus, I.181. Bochart, *Geographia sacra* cit. I 13, 51-55, 246, 263f., II 477f. Gen. 10.8-10; cf. Mic. 5.6.

³² Bochart, *Geographia sacra* cit. I 1-8.

³³ See below p. 294f.

³⁴ Joscelyn Godwin, *Athanasius Kircher. A Renaissance Man and his Quest for Lost Knowledge* (London 1979) 6, 19, 50-55, 62-65. On the Minerva Obelisk, see also Valerio Rivoecchi, *Esotismo in Roma barocca. Studi sul Padre Kircher* (Rome 1982) 134-38; Heinrich Pfeiffer in *Enciclopedismo in Roma barocca. Athanasius Kircher e il Museo del Collegio Romano*, ed. M. Casciato et al. (Venice 1986) 39-45.

of these editions is that they were lavishly illustrated with engravings of exceptional quality. The argument of the *Turris Babel* rests on the general premise that we know from Bochart. The Old Testament presents irrefutable evidence for the early history of mankind. More specifically, the developments leading from the Deluge to the Tower of Babel, the confusion of language and the dispersion of the human race can be corroborated with solid proofs. Kircher's supporting evidence can be summarized in three points.

1. For some decades after the Flood, Noah and his tribe continued to live in the region of Mount Ararat; then they all migrated to Sinear (Sennaar), which is Babylonia. There, according to Genesis 10.25, a first division occurred. Noah with Shem, Japheth and their clans moved on, leaving the vicious tribe of Ham behind to build the Tower. Indeed, Noah anticipated the outcome, and this is why he left. The Hamites too had been ordered to leave Sennaar. Nimrod convinced them to defy God's command and to build the Tower. Its height would protect them in case God resorted to another deluge. In the manner of the ancient historians, Kircher presents Nimrod's arguments in the form of a great harangue to his people. The speech, he admits, is of his own invention, but it is based on the authority of Josephus Flavius Judaeus, who cannot be faulted. For several pages he quotes what he says is Josephus as translated by Agostino Tornielli, a Barnabite scholar. But he forgot to check; what he is quoting is Tornielli himself, who on occasion refers to Josephus.³⁵

2. Genesis permits us to establish an exact chronology of these events. The Flood took place in 1656-57 after the Creation. 132 years later, in 1788, Peleg (Phaleg) was born, whose name means "division" (Genesis 10.25). This was when Noah and the Hamites parted company. The construction of the Tower of Babel began in 1818 after the Creation, that is to say 162 years after the Flood, and the confusion of language and second dispersion followed in 1931, or 275 years after the Flood.

3. Noah's separation of the three tribes and the subsequent dispersion effected by God, also the gigantic size of Nimrod's Tower project, call for an incredible growth of population to have taken place in just 132 (or 162) years. When the Flood abated mankind had shrunk to the sole family of Noah, his three sons and their wives.

³⁵ Athanasius Kircher, *Turris Babel sive Archontologia* (Amsterdam 1679) 10-17, 28-32. Agostino Tornielli, *Annales sacri et profani* (Antwerp 1620) I 204-6. The work was previously published in this form at Frankfurt, 1611.

They show that the growth rate presumed in Genesis is realistic, Kircher undertakes to calculate the potential increase. He assumes that in the first thirty years after the Flood each of Noah's three sons begot annually three sons and three daughters. That, he finds, makes a total of 360 sons and daughters. (For those of us who, unlike Kircher, need to respect basic arithmetic, that figure ought to have been 540.) These 360 youngsters would have reproduced, Kircher assumes, until the age of sixty. It follows, he thinks, that sixty years after the Flood the population might have increased to 21 600 souls, for 360 multiplied by 60 equals 21 600. (Is it that the annual birth rate has now dropped to one baby per couple, but by way of compensation some people start reproducing in the first year of their lives? Kircher also seems to have overlooked that two parents are needed to produce children and thus his multiplier ought to have been 180 rather than 360.) Ninety years after the Flood the population, by Kircher's reckoning, could have numbered 1 944 000, or 90 times 21 600. Continuing in his own inimitable science of statistics, he concludes that after 120 years mankind could have numbered as many as 23 328 000 000 souls (for 120 times 1 944 000 equals 23 328 000 000 by his calculation; by ours it would be 233 280 000).³⁶

For good measure, Kircher also demonstrates, complete with fine illustrations, why Nimrod's daring enterprise was bound to fail. The whole earth could not have supplied the quantity of building materials needed to complete his Tower. Also the distance between the earth and the heavenly sphere nearest to the earth, which is that of the moon, equals twenty-five times the diameter of the terrestrial globe. It therefore follows — clearly, says Kircher — that the weight of the completed Tower would have pushed the earth by one half diameter out of the centre of the universe. It also would have tilted it out of its equilibrium. The result would have been calamitous for the lower reaches of the universe. As for the earth, sunshine and moon light would only reach two thirds of it and climatic conditions would be altered accordingly. In a large part of the inhabited zone people would inevitably develop a violent temper, or else would have to leave. Finally, the shadow of the Tower would always cover part of the earth's upper hemisphere and likewise of the moon (apparently here thought to be at rest, like the earth). Kircher actually refers to

³⁶ Kircher, *Turris Babel* cit. 8-9. On p. 37 Kircher estimates that 275 years after the Deluge, when the Tower of Babel was built (he must mean when the project was abandoned), the actual number of mankind was 4 547 234.

Copernicus and Kepler, but the universe in which he lives is clearly not theirs.³⁷

Amid other digressions, the second book of the *Turris Babel* offers lengthy descriptions of some other extraordinary buildings of the ancient Orient. Of particular interest, however, is the third book, which deals with linguistics. Kircher assumed as a matter of course that Hebrew was man's first language and that none other existed, until God suddenly created any number of tongues as a punishment for the challenge offered to him with the building of the Tower. Not unnaturally, he presumed that languages spoken in the same region would normally be related. Thus most languages of the Far East were probably derived from Chinese, while Lithuanian had its place among the Slavic languages. The Romance languages were a corruption of Latin, due to the Germanic migrations. The confusion of language, for reasons not further explained by Kircher, also caused the true religion to become corrupted and idolatry to spring up.³⁸ On the other hand, the confusion of language apparently did not extend to writing. Kircher correctly recognized that the Semitic as well as Graeco-Latin alphabets could all be traced back to one original matrix. He found it easier than modern linguists to decide which alphabet had been the original one. The first set of "mystical" letters, he believed, had been brought down from Heaven for Adam and his offspring and was closely reflected in the Hebrew alphabet. Moreover, Kircher was careful not to associate the Egyptian hieroglyphics and the Chinese script with the derivatives of the angelic alphabet, since their pictorial origins were clearly recognizable to him.³⁹ Although his charts included a number of phantastic assumptions,⁴⁰ his judgement in this matter, by the standards of his time, was sound. In the development of languages and scripts Kircher and Bochart both recognized the principle of evolution, but it did not occur to them to ask whether this might call the biblical confusion theory into question.

We have seen that neither Bochart nor Kircher showed any readiness to abandon the traditional view that Genesis offered a reliable record of the two earliest phases in man's history. In the first, from Adam to

³⁷ Kircher, *Turris Babel* cit. 36-40.

³⁸ Kircher, *Turris Babel* cit. 131f., 162-64.

³⁹ Kircher, *Turris Babel* cit. 177-83. Kircher supposed, however, that some hieroglyphic signs at some point had also acquired the value of letters corresponding to the Greek alphabet.

⁴⁰ See e.g. his *Turris Babel* cit. 157.

Noah, mankind had been a single family. In the second, before or after the Tower of Babel, a family of first nations came into existence, each of them setting out on the path to a separate homeland and development. A startling challenge to this view was issued by Isaac La Peyrère (Pererius). It is true that he too considered the narrative books of the Old Testament as authentic history; to assign parts of them to *fabula* would have seemed a blasphemy to him. But authentic though that history was, it was no longer the same. It never was the history of all mankind. From the very beginning, from the time of Adam — not only from the time of Abraham, as was commonly thought — it was the history of the Jewish race. Isaac La Peyrère (1596-1676) was born into a Huguenot family, married and a lawyer by training. His *Prae-Adamitae*, the book that invites discussion at this point, was condemned by Catholics and protestants alike and caused the author to be thrown into a Brussels jail. He converted to Catholicism, recanted his former views and regained his freedom. From 1659 he served for some years as a librarian to Louis, fourth prince of Condé, and finally retired to an Oratorian house near Paris. From there he corresponded with Richard Simon, who was then a fellow-Oratorian in good standing and was later to write an apologetic biography of his unusual friend. La Peyrère's motives for conversion are not clear, but his retractions dealt ambiguously with the pre-Adamite theory. Indeed, it seems that he never gave it up.⁴¹

The *Prae-Adamitae* is a slim volume, published, in 1655 or soon after. It quickly ran to five editions and was also translated into English and Dutch.⁴² Its readers must put up with some incompletely developed arguments as well as many repetitions; in return they are presented with a intriguing theory. Although not really unprecedented, it must have struck almost all its early readers as an alarming novelty. Mulling over Romans 5.12-14, La Peyrère discovered in these verses the key to resolve some perturbing inconsistencies and contradictions in the first two chapters of Genesis. When Paul wrote that sin was already in the world before there was the Law and that death held

⁴¹ Richard H. Popkin, *Isaac La Peyrère (1596-1676)* (Leiden 1987) 5-20. Klaus Scholder, *Ursprünge und Probleme der Bibelkritik im 17. Jahrhundert* (Munich 1966) 98ff. and passim. Grafton, *Defenders of the Text* cit. 204-13.

⁴² Isaac La Peyrère, *Praeadamitae sive exercitatio super versibus duodecimo, decimotertio et decimoquarto capituli quinti Epistolae D. Pauli ad Romanos* (n.p. 1655); followed by *Systema theologicum ex Prae-Adamitarum hypothesis. Pars prima* (n.p. 1655). No "pars secunda" was published. The following references are to the 4° edition, perhaps published in Leiden.

sway from Adam to Moses, he confirmed that there had been a primeval human race, living in a state quite different from that of the patriarchs Adam, Noah and Abraham. On the sixth day of Creation, when God formed all terrestrial animals, he also created a race of men and women, fashioned after his own image (Gen. 1). These "Pre-Adamites" must be distinguished from Adam and Eve, formed by God in a subsequent and separate act of creation (Gen. 2). Although Adam was made from the same clay, he was created with the prospect of grace and Yahweh's covenant with Israel ahead of him. Adam was fashioned as the type of Christ and the first of God's chosen people (also in the Calvinist sense of Predestination).⁴³

In the light of this theory, La Peyrère believed he could give a better, more rational explanation of several parts of Genesis. The inhabitants of remote regions, such as America, needed no longer to be traced back to Noah's itinerant offspring. The Deluge could have been local rather than universal. Since Genesis for the most part was the history of Israel only, it needed no longer to be seen as conflicting with the secular annals of Egyptians and the Chaldeans or Babylonians.⁴⁴ La Peyrère also found that his theory had vast theological implications, and he realized that these might be incompatible with traditional orthodoxy. An understanding of Original Sin, he said, must start from Christ's redemption and move backwards to Adam's sin. In fact, it must not stop there, since the Pre-Adamites after the fall of Adam and Eve were retroactively subjected to Original Sin.⁴⁵ It followed, however, that they too were the beneficiaries of Christ's redemptive death. The way to Paradise was open to them no less than to the Jews of the pre-Christian era. At the end of the two published parts of the *Prae-Adamitae* La Peyrère promises a third that was to deal with the election of the Jews.⁴⁶ Although this was never published, the preface to the *Prae-Adamitae*, addressed to the Jews themselves living in dispersion, announces an argument of considerable boldness for one so level-headed as La Peyrère, although similar ideas were at the time quite popular among the Millenarian circles of Amsterdam and elsewhere.⁴⁷ He tells the Jews that not only

⁴³ La Peyrère, *Systema* cit. 15-26, 46-51, 113-23.

⁴⁴ La Peyrère, *Prae-Adamitae* cit. 19; *Systema* cit. 202-19, 230-35. Especially denying the universality of the Flood was a very bold step; see below p. 259f.

⁴⁵ La Peyrère, *Systema* cit., 243-49, 290f.

⁴⁶ La Peyrère, *Systema* cit., 293-97; cf. Popkin, *Isaac La Peyrère* cit. 42-59.

⁴⁷ K.O. Meinsma, *Spinoza en zijn kring* (The Hague 1896) 211 and passim.

is Christ their Messiah and thus their Saviour; presently God will also send them a king of their own race to wreak vengeance upon their enemies and lead them back to the Holy Land, from where they will never again be dislodged.⁴⁸

In a more critical vein, La Peyrère pointed out firmly that his Pre-Adamite theory did not by any means repair all the shortcomings of the Old Testament. Its historical parts were all apographs rather than autographs and sometimes actually referred to earlier sources. The Pentateuch could not have been written by either Moses or Joshua, since it referred to their deaths. Likewise Deuteronomy 1.[1ff.] records words spoken by Moses to his people in the desert "on the other side of the Jordan (*trans Iordanem*).⁴⁹ Moses never entered the Promised Land; had he really written this passage, he ought to have said "on this side (*cis Iordanem*)."⁴⁹ There were more such giveaways; for instance Deuteronomy 3.[14], explaining the name of Bashan-Jair (Havvoth-Jair), added that the place was called like this "to the present day." In the specific instance of the universal Flood, La Peyrère went even further and pronounced the tale in Genesis to be "nonsense ... proffered in prophetic language and with frantic exaggeration."⁵⁰ In short, he was able to see the Old Testament in a new light as a complex historical document of the Jewish past, compiled by editors and scribes from earlier sources now lost. In particular, his theory of two creations of man, a generic one in Genesis 1 and an individual one in Genesis 2-3, points to a subsequent

⁴⁸ La Peyrère, *Prae-Adamitae* cit., 5: "*Restituet vobis regnum vestrum Deus per spiritum Iesu et Christi sui, Messiae vestri. Sed etiam exorietur (si non exortus est) vestris ex ossibus et fratribus ultor et rex vester, qui virtute Dei et spiritu Christi fretus gentes vobis inimicas conteret, vosque in manu forti et brachio extenso patriae vestrae et terrae sanctae restituet, ut illum in aeternum confidenter et soli habitetis.*" This preface, a letter addressed to "*Synagogis Iudaeorum universis ...*" is inserted at different places in different copies and editions. In his earliest and little noted publication, *Du Rappel des Juifs* (n.p. 1643), La Peyrère had written in — often bizarre — detail about a Christian change of heart and a new Jewish Christian church that would induce all Jews to convert. Afterwards they would be resettled in Palestine under the auspices of the King of France. See Popkin, *Isaac La Peyrère* cit. 6-8.

⁴⁹ The same argument was produced shortly afterwards by Spinoza, who said he had found it in Abraham Ibn Ezra; see Benedictus de Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus* ch. 8, in *Opera* ed. J. van Vloten and J.P.N. Land, 3rd ed. (The Hague 1914) II 191.

⁵⁰ La Peyrère, *Systema* cit. 171-78, 202-7. The passage in Deuteronomy was the subject of ongoing debate. Pierre-Daniel Huet and Jean Le Clerc will be mentioned later on. In his *Demonstratio evangelica*, 175 (ch. 14), Huet took issue with Spinoza, who had argued along the lines of La Peyrère. In a dissertation on the authorship of the Pentateuch included in his *Genesis*, Le Clerc agreed that the passage was not by Moses, but argued that it was an insignificant addition.

discovery of which there is as yet no hint in his book: "Adam" in Genesis 1 must be read as a reference to mankind collectively, whereas in Genesis 2-3, used with the definitive article, "Adam" refers to one individual male. Here La Peyrère himself had reached a Jordan that was not for him to cross. His theory never caught on and today it is taken for granted that Genesis 1-3 does not present a record of two divine creations, but two versions of the same myth of origins. Despite his progress towards a critical study of the Bible, the Old Testament to La Peyrère still was an inspired document, sacred history. The task of erudition was to enhance this understanding, not to undermine it. His erudite theory of two creations in the end served *fabula*, not *historia*.

Among the scholars who enlisted reason to vindicate the literal truth of the Old Testament, the prize may well go to Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630-1721). A well-connected and highly-placed French prelate, Huet was of Huguenot descent and, his firm Catholicism notwithstanding, revered his great teacher, the Huguenot minister Bochart, whom he had accompanied on his trip to Sweden. He endeavoured to show, conclusively and comprehensively, that every book of the Bible could satisfy the highest scientific standards of accuracy and veracity. In calling his opus *Demonstratio evangelica* (1679), he laid claim to a finality comparable with the mathematical "*Quod erat demonstrandum*."⁵¹ In Bochart's wake, he demonstrated to his own satisfaction and that of many readers — the huge work went through four editions in fifteen years — that the mythologies, philosophies and laws of ancient Europe, the Middle East, India and even America had all sprung from the Pentateuch and that all their gods could ultimately be reduced to the one Moses.⁵² Also Moses' authentic authorship of the five books attributed to him was defended at great length, especially against the subversion of Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus*. As Huet demonstrated with three hundred pages of parallels, the Old Testament was, above all, the prophetic forecast of the New. To deny its authenticity was to deny the truth of the Christian religion. Huet's scholarship was ultimately an assault on scepticism and an offering to faith, but to qualify as scholarship, it also had to question traditional assumptions in the light

⁵¹ Pierre-Daniel Huet, *Demonstratio evangelica ad Serenissimum Delphinum*, 3rd ed. (Paris 1609) 3 (Praefatio).

⁵² Huet's tenth chapter is entitled: "*Fabulae omnes dii unus idemque sunt, nempe Moses*;" see *Demonstratio evangelica* cit. 140. Hazard, *The European Mind* cit. 45f., 205.

of philological and historical learning, and it did so vigorously. Huet faced the horns of a dilemma. What he wanted first and last was to believe, but in order to believe all of Scripture, he had to satisfy himself that all was reasonable, and that also meant proving the unprovable, evincing the truth of *fabula*.⁵³

We have seen that Bochart, Kircher, La Peyrère and Huet stood on common ground in so far as all considered the Old Testament to be an authentic historical document. Philology, reason and logic were the handmaids of *sacra historia*, engaged to serve the mistress and to show her off in her full splendour of literal truth. Unfortunately it was a case of mistaken identity; the mistress was *fabula* rather than *historia*. So they had laboured in vain, for myths and legends are neither literally true nor provable by rational argument. In the seventeenth century this mistaken approach was normal; indeed, it was still being pursued in the eighteenth century when other, more convincing approaches were available.

To briefly demonstrate the survival of mythifying approaches to the Old Testament into the eighteenth century, we might begin with chronology. We had earlier mentioned Scaliger's stunning support for Egyptian dynasties ruling before the beginning of time and, following it, some of the devices suggested to salvage the conventional time line based on the Pentateuch and beginning with the Creation.⁵⁴ In the early eighteenth century several papers presented to the Paris Académie des Inscriptions dealt with the vexing question how the newly discovered history of ancient China could be fitted into the Old Testament time frame. As late as 1744, Abbé Louis-François de Fontenu (1667-1759) was assured that Moses had given a reliable chronology in perfect harmony with other sources such as the Chinese.⁵⁵ If attempts to date the Creation and the Tower of Babel

⁵³ Huet, *Demonstratio evangelica* cit. 134ff. Christopher Ligota, "Der apologetische Rahmen der Mythendeutung im Frankreich des 17. Jahrhunderts (P.D. Huet)" in *Mythographie der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Killy cit. 149-61. Especially Ligota's analysis of the correspondence between Huet and Leibniz is relevant in our context.

⁵⁴ See above pp. 224-26.

⁵⁵ *Histoire de l'Académie royale des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, with accompanying *Mémoires* volumes, XVIII, 1744-46 (Paris 1753) 10f. More interesting is a paper presented in 1733 by the Academy's expert on China, Nicolas Fréret. Fréret recognized that the Chinese civilization developed much later than the Near-Eastern ones and concluded that for a long time the Chinese had remained in the savage state that followed upon the Tower of Babel and the confusion of language: *Histoire* cit. X, 1731-33 (Paris 1736) 377-402. See also Etienne Fourment's paper in *Histoire* cit. XIII, 1734-37 (Paris 1740) 507-19. On Fréret, see Danielle

were given up towards the end of the eighteenth century, the Deluge continued to be assigned a precise year well into the nineteenth.⁵⁶ Although La Peyrère's solution of confining the Flood to a single region became increasingly attractive, many writers continued to find proof that the waters had covered all of the inhabited world or, indeed, the entire globe.⁵⁷ Moreover, those who were able to retain a precise date for the Flood and at least an approximative one for the construction of the Babylonian Tower had normally no difficulty either in accepting the sudden appearance of different languages and races by divine fiat.

Those who continued to accept the Old Testament as a historical document of divine inspiration could hardly avoid dealing with the question of its transmission. Many were troubled by the views of Louis Cappel, Richard Simon and others, who recognized an editorial process in successive stages.⁵⁸ To rebut them, one had to begin with Adam, fashioned by God after his own image (Genesis 1.26) and therefore a mirror of God's own perfection. Athanasius Kircher maintained the traditional view that Adam's accomplishments included writing and reading and that he and his immediate offspring had left behind written records. These precious records, Kircher argued, survived the Deluge because Noah had thoughtfully taken them with him into the ark. His wicked son Ham, however, had done likewise with some pristine books of black magic, or else he had engraved them on imperishable stones, because he knew that they would not be tolerated in the ark.⁵⁹ Beginning with Calvin and the Lutheran Martin Chemnitz in the sixteenth century, protestant authors speculated that such records were available to Moses, when he wrote the Pentateuch, and were kept by him in the ark of the covenant. This view could be used to bolster the protestant emphasis on *sola Scriptura*.⁶⁰ At the eve of the *siècle des lumières*, amid his battles for the cause of progress, Jean Le Clerc (1657-1736) worried about the authorship of the Pentateuch. Eventually he revised the bolder stance he had taken earlier and suggested that Moses had composed the Genesis account

Elisèff-Poisle, *Nicolas Fréret (1688-1749). Réflexions d'un humaniste du XVIII^e siècle sur la Chine* (Paris 1978).

⁵⁶ See below p. 260.

⁵⁷ Fulcran Vigouroux, *Dictionnaire de la Bible* (Paris 1895-1912) II 1343-58. See below p. 259.

⁵⁸ See above pp. 223, 228-32.

⁵⁹ Athanasius Kircher, *Arca Noë* (Amsterdam 1675) 4-8, 204-22.

⁶⁰ Kraus, *Geschichte ... des Alten Testaments* cit. 33.

of the times prior to his own on the basis of written sources. Moses could also have obtained his knowledge by divine inspiration, but since he never said that he did, this possibility could be ruled out. Le Clerc next examined a number of Pentateuch passages in which Moses' personal authorship had been questioned. In most cases he found the critical arguments unconvincing. The few addenda that were evidently made by a later hand could hardly diminish Moses' claim to the single authorship of the Pentateuch.⁶¹ In 1715 and 1720 the Abbé Antoine Anselme (1652-1737) presented to the Paris Académie des Inscriptions two dissertations on the question of the sources, written or otherwise, of the "earliest historians." Conforming to the Catholic emphasis on an oral tradition, he withheld judgement on the problem as to when writing had actually begun, but maintained, in view of Job 19.23, that Job's story had been written down before the Pentateuch was. Moses' information, he thought, was primarily derived from oral sources and also from statues, columns and the like.⁶² On the other hand, the encyclopedias of Louis Moreri and Augustin Calmet both maintained that Adam and some of his descendants had written books.⁶³ While such opinions persisted, Christian Thomasius, in 1700, had ridiculed the schools that were thought to have been established soon after Adam's fall for the noble purpose of teaching catechism.⁶⁴

An infinity of similar problems remained to be wrestled with. To give just one example, in the early eighteenth century Pentateuch

⁶¹ *Genesis sive Mosis prophetae liber primus*, transl., paraphrased and commented upon by Jean Le Clerc (Amsterdam 1693). Among the preliminary pieces (without pagination) is a dissertation on Moses' authorship of the Pentateuch. Some of Le Clerc's points were later taken up by Jean Astruc in his *Conjectures sur ... Moyse* cit., e.g. 5-7, 465-77. See also Kraus, *Geschichte ... des Alten Testaments* cit. 70-73. In contrast to his later position, Le Clerc had basically rejected Moses' authorship in his *Sentimens* cit. of 1685. See Henning Graf Reventlow, "Bibelexegese als Aufklärung. Die Bibel im Denken des Johannes Clericus (1657-1736)" in *Historische Kritik und biblischer Kanon in der deutschen Aufklärung*, ed. Henning Graf Reventlow et al. (Wiesbaden 1988) 1-19, esp. 14f.

⁶² *Histoire de l'Académie royale des Inscriptions* cit. IV, 1711-17 (Paris 1723) 380-99 and VI, 1718-25 (Paris 1729) 1-13.

⁶³ Louis Moreri, *Le Grand dictionnaire historique* (Lyon 1674 and reprinted for over a century) s.v. Déluge. Augustin Calmet, *Dictionnaire historique, critique, chronologique, géographique et littéral de la Bible* (Paris 1720-21) s.v. Adam; 4th, revised ed. (Paris 1845-46) I 161.

⁶⁴ [Christian Thomasius et al.] *Observationum selectarum ad rem litterariam spectantium tomus I* (Halle 1700) 277-303: "De scholis antediluvianis," esp. 284. This article is by Thomasius himself; see Rolf Lieberwirth, *Christian Thomasius ... Eine Bibliographie* (Weimar 1955) 70.

references to giants led to flurry of debates in the Académie des Inscriptions, regardless of the fact that two centuries earlier François Rabelais had ridiculed the matter together with the genealogical craze of the Renaissance. Rabelais had the giant Hurtle, ancestor of Gargantua, ride out the Flood, sitting astride the ark.⁶⁵ Even Giambattista Vico took the postdiluvian giants seriously enough to find room for them in his theory of primitive society. In the virgin forests inhabited by the progeny of Ham, humans lived like wild animals and mothers abandoned their infants as soon as they were weaned. In the thick undergrowth the latter developed strong muscles and, romping around naked amid their faeces, they grew to giant size — just as crops will stand tall in a well-manured field.⁶⁶ By contrast, Theodorus Ryckius, faithful to the false tenet that nature never changes, argued that since no giants existed in his time it was absurd to believe that any had existed earlier.⁶⁷

We need not monitor this kind of discussions any further. Suffice it to point out in conclusion that maintaining the literal truth of the Old Testament and offering proof of its historical soundness also determined one's approach to classical mythology. When *historia sacra* came into play, one could insulate one's mind against the winds of criticism blowing in from the region of secular history. Guillaume de Lavar (1653-1730) is an example. In his *Conférence de la fable avec l'histoire sainte* (1730) he claimed, on the one hand, that historical sources offered not a shred of evidence to confirm the tales of Troy and the dispersal of Trojan heroes, who were to start the dynasties and republics of Europe. On the other hand, a myth like that of Paris' judgement might well conceal faint reflections of the true vicissitudes that the Old Testament reported of Kings David and Solomon. The traditional identifications of mythical Janus, Jupiter, Neptune and Pluto with historical Noah, Ham, Japheth and Shem,

⁶⁵ See Vulgate Gen. 6.4; Deut. 2.10f., 20; 3, 11f., 13 and e.g. *Histoire de l'Académie* cit. I, to 1710 (Paris 1717) 125-28, III, 1711-17 (Paris 1723) 169-74: the abbé Jean-Marie de Tilladet concluded that, given the size of their children, Adam and Eve themselves must have been giants, whereas Academician Nicolas Mahudel argued that the size of biblical giants could not exceed proportions compatible with human anatomy. François Rabelais, *Pantagruel* ch. 1; cf. the ref. in ch. 4 to the biblical giant Og of Bashan (Deut. 3.11). Rabelais mentions the Masoretic tradition, according to which Og had ridden the ark. Og gave also rise to a controversy between Spinoza and Huet. In general, see Stephen, *Giants in Those Days* cit.

⁶⁶ Vico, *La Scienza nuova seconda* II § 369, ed. Nicolini cit. 141f.

⁶⁷ For Ryckius see below p. 300f. Theodorus Ryckius, "Oratio de gigantibus," given in Leiden in 1681, reprinted in Wilhelm Dindorf's ed. of Stephanus Byzantinus (Berlin 1825) II Appendix 179-211.

respectively, were all faithfully retained, and Bochart was cited as an authoritative witness on countless occasions. King Numa Pompilius, whose historicity Lavour did not doubt, presumably had read Moses' Pentateuch. Even Plutarch became acquainted with it during his visit to Egypt.⁶⁸ Lavour was taken seriously for a long time. In the 1830s his work appeared in a Spanish translation, and in the 1845-46 edition of Calmet's Bible dictionary he still is quoted at length on the roles of Noah and his three sons in Greek mythology.⁶⁹

IV

The Birth of the Concept of Sovereign Myth

By 1700 it was widely accepted, at least in learned circles, that the Pentateuch derived from several sources, some of which — even all, according to some scholars — had been written long after Moses. But who, in 1700, would have doubted the existence of a historical Moses, on whose life the Pentateuch offered detailed and accurate information? Not even the historicity of Adam, Noah and their kin were being denied outright, although plenty of questions were being asked about some events in their lives as reported in Scripture. By 1800 this situation had changed dramatically. The presence of myth in the Old Testament had been clearly demonstrated, although it was not by any means universally accepted. Accordingly, facts and figures traditionally taken as historical could now be assigned to the sphere of myths and folk tales. To say that they were not historical, moreover, was not necessarily to claim that they lacked truth. The view was gaining acceptance that myths possessed their own truth, different from that of historical facts. By and large, the presence of *fabula* in the Old Testament was no longer in doubt. The question now was how, and whether at all, its presence could be reconciled with divine inspiration. On the way to this new horizon we encounter two strands

⁶⁸ Guillaume de Lavour, *Conférence de la Fable avec l'Histoire Sainte, où l'on voit que les grandes fables, le culte et les mystères du paganisme ne sont que des copies altérées des histoires, des usages et des traditions des Hébreux* (Paris 1730) esp. Preface 7-9, I 1-65, II 167-81.

⁶⁹ Calmet, *Dictionnaire ... de la Bible*, 4th ed. cit. I 1038.

of thought. We shall attempt to illustrate each of them with brief references to one famous work. Both these works were written by outstanding thinkers, whose general importance is well beyond the scope of this study. We shall turn to Baruch Spinoza for a glance at the idea of accommodation and to Giambattista Vico for an early and essentially secular appreciation of primitive society in the mythical age.

In 1670 Baruch Spinoza (1632-77) published anonymously his famous *Tractatus theologico-politicus*. He did so, in part, to counter charges of atheism and libertinism that had led to his excommunication by the Amsterdam rabbis in 1656 and to hostile pamphleteering by Christian contemporaries. But while expressing Spinoza's religious faith with a good deal of honesty, the *Tractatus* only led to the further charge of dissimulation being added to the ones previously levelled at him.⁷⁰ In the seventh chapter of the *Tractatus* Spinoza elaborated his method of criticism. In analogy with natural science, he said, Bible exegesis must gather secure data exclusively from its own subject matter, namely the Bible, avoiding all extraneous explanations, especially supernatural ones. To do this, an expert knowledge of Hebrew and, indeed, a feeling for that idiom were indispensable, as was methodical exploration of the topics addressed in the text. In this way a proper *historia* of Scripture could be written, in analogy to the *historia naturae*.⁷¹ Most of the *Tractatus* is indeed a historical analysis of the Old Testament, examining the canon, book by book, and attempting to identify the different authors.⁷² Spinoza demonstrated that there is no need to posit any miracles nor to credit the authors with prophetic revelations beyond the sphere of moral conduct. "Prophecy in his view can give no information about nature and precious little about God."⁷³

In view of our findings earlier in this chapter it will be clear that Spinoza's procedure was not unprecedented, although it may never before have been applied so methodically and perceptively. Among his contemporaries, Simon, Le Clerc, and even Bayle were travelling the

⁷⁰ Paul Vernière, *Spinoza et la pensée française avant la Révolution* (Paris 1954) I 19f.

⁷¹ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus* ch. 7, *Opera*, ed. Van Vloten and Land cit. II 172-76.

⁷² The same had been done, but more in passing, by Thomas Hobbes in ch. 33 of the *Leviathan* (1651).

⁷³ Sarah Hutton, "Reason and Revelation in the Cambridge Platonists, and their Reception of Spinoza" in *Spinoza in der Frühzeit seiner religiösen Wirkung*, ed K. Gründer and W. Schmidt-Biggemann (Heidelberg 1984) 181-200, here 183.

same route and, just for that reason, feared being compromised by Spinoza's terrible reputation. Thus they were prepared to repeat the usual accusations brought against him. Richard Simon, for instance, who apparently became aware of Spinoza's *Tractatus* in time to make revisions to the manuscript of his own *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*,⁷⁴ turned on Spinoza in his preface. He was at pains to demonstrate that a gulf separated their two works. Somewhat implausibly he argued that Spinoza was out to undermine the authority of the revealed Word of God, whereas he himself acknowledged the divine inspiration of every author and editor, whose hand was recognizable in the canon.⁷⁵

Another, and most interesting, aspect of Spinoza's work was not, I think, properly recognized until much later. We shall have to say more about the exegetical device of accommodation, when we reach the eighteenth century.⁷⁶ Accommodation served to reconcile the inspired character of the Holy Writ with its apparent offenses against the laws of reason and science. It could also serve to expose such offenses mercilessly without admitting that the Holy Ghost was amiss. Rather God had to accommodate his revelations to the simple ideas of a primitive age, while to a more advanced generation he granted the sense to understand that such was the case. Traces of an accommodation theory can be found in Erasmus of Rotterdam,⁷⁷ and there were, no doubt, other forerunners all the way back to patristic literature, but the eager and systematic fashion in which Spinoza pursues accommodation is striking. It must have seemed to him a novel and most significant insight. Noah's perception of the impending Flood is stated with admirable succinctness. "In keeping with his mental capacity, it was revealed to Noah that God would destroy the human race, for Noah believed that outside Palestine the world was not inhabited."⁷⁸ In addition to showing how God's communication — in this case as in so many others — is adapted to the recipient's powers of comprehension, Spinoza also settles most economically

⁷⁴ John D. Woodbridge, "Richard Simon's Reaction to Spinoza's 'Tractatus theologico-Politicus'" in *Spinoza in der Frühzeit seiner religiösen Wirkung*, ed. Gründer et al. cit. 201-26.

⁷⁵ Simon, *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* cit., Préface de l'auteur.

⁷⁶ See below pp. 266-69.

⁷⁷ See e.g. *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi*, ed. Allen cit. IV Ep. 1202:66-104, 285f.

⁷⁸ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus* ch. 2, *Opera* cit. II 114: "Ad captum Noachi etiam revelatum ei fuit Deum humanum genus delere, quia putabat mundum extra Palaestinam non inhabitari."

another, as we know, explosive issue. The Flood, evidently, was local rather than universal.

Spinoza's Adam too is a far cry from Kircher's epitome of all possible knowledge, created after God's own image. To Spinoza, Adam's actions after the Fall show that he knew God only as the Creator, but was unaware of God's omniscience and omnipresence — mental concepts that had not been revealed to him because he was not ready to understand them. Thus he tried to hide before God and, when brought to account, he answered evasively.⁷⁹ Spinoza's Adam, so unlike Kircher's, bears comparison with the concept of the primeval savage, such as we shall soon find in the work of Vico. On the other hand, Spinoza never treated Adam as a poetical invention. It is true that in another passage of the *Tractatus* he stated, albeit not without some hedging, that the "*historia*" of Adam's fall was a "*parabola*" rather than a "*simplex narratio*."⁸⁰ In his Letter 20 he admitted the possibility that God might instruct the human authors of Scripture to speak in parables, but insisted that to him this would not lessen its "infallible truth and divinity." However impersonal his notion of the Almighty may have been, Genesis to Spinoza reflected specific human beings and a divine order of human affairs rather than a mythical age of primitive mankind.

It may be said that in the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* Spinoza himself practised a form of accommodation not entirely unlike the one he perceived God employing in the Old Testament. By necessity a skilful dissimulator, he carefully avoided giving any hint of his rejection of Christ's divinity and of individual immortality — a rejection that is clearly revealed in statements he made elsewhere. In the *Tractatus* he refrained altogether from discussing passages of the New Testament and even professed, no doubt without conviction, that Christ's words were divine revelations of universal validity. The prophets of the Old Testament, by contrast, could only relate God's instructions as applicable to specific times and places. Uniquely in Christ's case, he said, had God revealed himself without recourse to any accommodation.⁸¹ Accommodation, as Spinoza used the term,

⁷⁹ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus* ch. 2, *Opera* cit. 115. Gen. 3.8-11.

⁸⁰ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus* ch. 4, *Opera* cit. II 141f.

⁸¹ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, ch. 4, *Opera* cit. II 140: "*Quapropter aequè a ratione alienum esset statuere Deum suas revelationes opinionibus Christi accommodavisse, ac quod Deus antea suas revelationes opinionibus angelorum, hoc est vocis creatae et visionum, accommodaverit, ut res revelandas prophetis communicaret ...*" The term "accommodation" is

referred to direct communication between Yahweh and his creatures, but since he did not really believe in a personal God, this may present something of a metaphor. It may be impossible to say precisely what Spinoza had in mind. The German theologians who used the term after him, for the most part orthodox Lutherans, would be spared this peculiar dilemma. Accommodation was apparently not among the facets of Spinoza's thinking that rendered him well-known and controversial among his contemporaries. The first French and English translations of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* appeared in 1678 and 1689, respectively, but it was not until a century later that accommodation became a widely debated issue in Germany, where four different translations of Spinoza's *Tractatus* were published between 1787 and 1841. For a while the concept of accommodation would offer great comfort to many biblical scholars. It allowed them to deny the literal truth of certain scriptural passages and to do so piously, on account of an overriding truth that, unlike many allegorical constructs of the past, could satisfy reason.

Among the scholars of the early eighteenth century, who knew Spinoza but did not react to his notion of accommodation was Giambattista Vico (1668-1744). Unlike Spinoza, Vico did believe in a personal God and thus would not have faced Spinoza's problem with accommodation. One good reason that prevented Vico from entertaining the notion was simply that his interest in the Bible was marginal. In his great *Scienza nuova* (1725; revised and much enlarged 1744) he proposed novel ways to gain some insight into the earliest times. He had the courage to realize that, despite Genesis and its myriad commentators, the beginnings of human society were wrapped in utter darkness. He also had the genius to see how this darkness might be penetrated.⁸² From Genesis he retained the notion of a pristine and homogeneous society that was at some point transformed into one of diverse nations and languages. It was by turning to Homer and the classics in general that Vico found he could come to understand this process of transformation. What he encountered in Homer, however, was not an almighty God, apt to simplify his teachings so that he would be understood by savages, but a primitive society that lived and thought according to its natural

not included in Emilia Giancotti Boscherini, *Lexicon Spinozanum* (The Hague 1970).

⁸² See e.g. David Bidney, "Vico's New Science of Myth" in *Giambattista Vico. An International Symposium*, ed. Giorgio Tagliacozzo (Baltimore 1969) 259-77.

condition. In his attempt to reconstruct the life of that society, Vico did, however, retain the biblical Deluge together with its traditional date (the year 1656 from the Creation). He even undertook to prove the universality of the Flood. Typically, he rejected all the arguments used in the past and produced a novel explanation that can serve us as a demonstration of his entire method.

Two hundred years after the Flood, Nimrod's foolish project of the Tower of Babel "by way of a miracle" brought about the instantaneous changeover from the one "*lingua santa avantidiluviana*" to a multitude of separate oriental languages. The Semites, offspring of Shem, discovered astrology, and thus arose mankind's first sage, Zoroaster, whose name, according to an ancient tradition Vico had found in Bochart, meant "star-gazer." While the Semites were laying the groundwork for human civilization, the races of Ham and Japheth kept spreading themselves out through the world's huge forests. They carried on like this for two hundred years, and with each new generation they grew more savage and deprived of human language and behaviour. This was how the false religions were born. It took two hundred years for the soil to dry out after the Flood; when it had done so, "it could send off dry vapours into the air, and thus lightning would be generated." The frightened savages everywhere associated lightning and thunder with divinity. As a result, we now know of "so many Jupiters that the philologists can only marvel at it, for every pagan nation had its own, ... each of them being a record of physical history, preserved for us in that particular myth — which goes to show that the Flood was indeed universal."⁸³

Neither here nor anywhere else does Vico tell us directly that the Genesis account of the Flood is a myth and that Noah and his sons are poetical inventions, although he will say as much of many episodes related in Homer and always assigns the Flood to that earliest age which knew no language other than that of *fabula*. Perhaps he was being cautious, but when it suited him he could also speak of pagan mythical characters in terms of reality. The point is that they were indeed real since *fabula*, his "*storia poetica*," was real. It preserved the authentic "*istoria fisica*," which prior to himself, so Vico believed, no one had been able to find there. In truth, Vico had learned to listen to the language of the pristine age of myth. Given the magnitude of this achievement, it does not matter that many of his

⁸³ Vico, *La Scienza nuova seconda* cit. I § 62, II §§ 377-80; cf. I § 169.

particular interpretations are as questionable as the details of his just mentioned account of the origins of pagan religions, nor that he retained an exact chronology, which is out of place in a mythical age.

Outside his native city of Naples Vico's work was largely ignored until well into the nineteenth century. Even in the case of Herder, who did so much to encourage a reading of the Old Testament consonant to Vico's way of thinking, the question of a direct influence is tantalizingly unclear.⁸⁴ Meanwhile, within the traditional circumscription of Old Testament scholarship new approaches were being tested that were bound to create an opening for the notion of myth. Robert Lowth (1710-87) taught Hebrew at Oxford and later died as bishop of London. In 1753 he published *De sacra poesi Hebraeorum praelectiones*. He likely did not read Vico, but he shared with him the fundamental view that the earliest poetry was religious and flowed from emotional impulses basic to human nature. Therefore it was to be found everywhere. Employing the classification traditionally observed in poetics, Lowth presented the Song of Songs as a major example of the dramatic genre of poetry. He followed the conservative Bossuet in his structural analysis of the poem and rejected any interpretation that was not exclusively allegorical.⁸⁵ On the other hand, the focus on poetry in itself was bound to present the Old Testament in a new light. As a cornucopia of powerful emotions it would soon appeal to the mood of early Romanticism. Even by applying the classical categories of form to the Old Testament, Lowth was opening new prospects. In his lecture on Prosopopoeia he taught his students to look for fictional characters: "a stage and a person supplied to actions that are only imagined or otherwise lack a motive and a meaning,"⁸⁶ and likewise for fictional speeches. It is true that the question of historicity was irrelevant to most of the verse passages discussed by Lowth, but towards the end of his treatise he had to face

⁸⁴ Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder. Two Studies in the History of Ideas* (New York 1976) 4, 91, 147, also for the delayed influence of Vico, xix-xx, 8, 90-95.

⁸⁵ First published in 1753, the work was re-edited in 1758 by J.D. Michaelis, who added lengthy commentaries of his own. My references are to a reprint of Michaelis' edition: Robert Lowth, *De sacra poesi Hebraeorum praelectiones* (Göttingen 1770) 593-638 (Lectures 30 and 31). Many of Michaelis' notes were translated together with Lowth's lectures by G. Gregory for an English edition (London 1787). See Christian Hartlich and Walter Sachs, *Der Ursprung des Mythosbegriffes in der modernen Bibelwissenschaft* (Tübingen 1952) 6-10; Friedrich Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Historismus in Werke* (Munich 1957-62) III 249-52; James F. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry. Parallelism and its History* (New Haven 1981) 274-86.

⁸⁶ "... cum rebus vel fictis vel ratione ac sensu carentibus actio et persona datur." Lowth, *De sacra poesi* cit. 252-65 (Lecture 13).

it when he reached the Book of Job. Whether Job was a real person or a fiction had long been controversial, as had many questions about the origins and meaning of that enigmatic book. Even Spinoza had taken Job to be historical, but he admitted that Talmudic exegetes, echoed by Maimonides, had sometimes viewed the tale as a parable. That latter opinion was dismissed by Lowth rather curtly; he simply stated his support for the view that the book, no doubt the oldest of the entire canon, was written by none other than Job himself.⁸⁷ But five years later, when Johann David Michaelis re-edited Lowth's work in 1758, the time for a thorough discussion had arrived. The very title of an excursus that Michaelis devoted to Job asked bluntly: "*Jobi carmen fabulam? An historiam?*" To maintain that the poem was historical, Michaelis argued, was groundless. Take its confrontation between God and Satan; nobody would mistake their words for historical records. Even what was spoken by human actors sounded most unlike spontaneous conversation. All figures stated in the text were either implausible, or they were round figures that were clearly meant to be symbolical. On the other hand, to assume that the poem was a fable would automatically lead the reader to face the profound ethical and theological problems raised by the tale.

Since the question of historicity had now been posed clearly and prominently, comparisons between Job and other figures proved inevitable. One only needed to look beyond the few texts in verse, and the Old Testament was teeming with characters as doubtful as Job, or possibly more so. Michaelis compared Job to Lazarus and the good Samaritan, whose fictionality he took for granted, and also to Noah and Daniel, in this case without questioning their historicity.⁸⁸ But Noah too, as a historical character, was doomed. In 1812 Philipp Buttmann (1764-1829), the well-read secretary of the Berlin Academy, gave a fine lecture on the "Myth of the Deluge." He analyzed the tale in Genesis in the context of other Flood stories and suggested for all of them an Indian prototype. Noah was simply part of this myth. In the end, Buttmann cautiously proposed to explain him in etymological terms. His name suggested that originally he might have been an

⁸⁷ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, chs. 2, 10, *Opera* cit. II 120, 216. Lowth, *De sacra poesi* cit. 649-52 (Lecture 32). In another excursus, appended to Lecture 9, Michaelis forcefully argues the presence of fables in the Old Testament. The English translator, in an additional note to Lecture 32, rallied to Lowth's defence: "I cannot help thinking with our author, that such a man as Job might very possibly have existed."

⁸⁸ Lowth, *De sacra poesi* cit. 662-70 (Lecture 32).

aquatic divinity and, as such, might himself have been seen as the cause of the Flood.⁸⁹ In France too, Voltaire from about 1760 had subjected the Pentateuch to a polemic that grew steadily more impassioned. For good measure, really — for he was not interested either in exegesis or in a serious debate on historicity — he questioned the existence of Joseph, Abraham and even Moses, suggesting that they all might be characters borrowed from this or that mythical tale of Mesopotamia, Egypt or Greece. Whatever comparison happened to come to mind and seemed halfway suitable, Voltaire threw it in.⁹⁰

To return to Job, in Germany the debate on his account kept growing in extent and sophistication. Johann Joachim Bellermand, in a monograph exclusively devoted to the precise question of Job's historicity, and subsequently F.W.C. Umbreit retained the basic contention that the tale was fictitious but would not rule out that, by way of a long oral tradition, it might obscurely point back to a person that had actually existed.⁹¹ Thus, the denouement that had been so long in coming, the flat negation of historicity to Job and his like, was open to challenge again no sooner than it had arrived. Characteristically, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), a man of greater perception and sensitivity than the common run of Old Testament professors, abandoned that tack altogether. In his work *Vom Geist der ebräischen Poesie* (1781/86) he discussed Job in a fictional dialogue. The speaker representing Herder is being asked whether he believes that the book is based on a historical account (*"eine Geschichte"*). *"Das ist mir gleichgültig,"* he answers: "I do not care. It is by the power and depth of its poetry that it is being turned into a history of rare distinction. It becomes the history of all men

⁸⁹ Philipp Buttmann, "Über den Mythos der Sündflut," reprinted in his *Mythologus oder gesammelte Abhandlungen über die Sagen des Alterthums* (Berlin 1828-29) I 180-214, esp. 203ff. For Buttmann see below p. 370.

⁹⁰ David Levy, *Voltaire et son exégèse du Pentateuque: critique et polémique*, Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 130, ed T. Bestermann (Banbury 1975) 55-57, 341. In ch. 23 of *Dieu et les hommes* (1769) Voltaire questioned the existence of Moses in his usual, flimsy fashion, fathering his own opinion, as he liked to do, upon the English "Free-thinkers": *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire*, ed. L.E.D. Moland (Paris 1877-85) 28.177.

⁹¹ Friedrich Wilhelm Carl Umbreit, *Das Buch Hiob. Übersetzung und Auslegung* (Heidelberg 1824) xv. Umbreit mentions: Johann Joachim Bellermand, *De libro Jobi, num sit historia aut fictio* (Erfurt 1792). I have not found this book; could it be identical with Bellermand's *De libri Jobi indole et artificiosa designatione* (Erfurt 1793)? A more forthright defender of Job's historicity was the English translator of Lowth and Michaelis; see above n. 87. In general see Hans-Peter Müller, *Das Hiobproblem* (Darmstadt 1978).

who have suffered on account of righteousness."⁹² Historicity? — Herder dismisses the question out of hand. It merely dimmed the simple, spontaneous splendor of the biblical poetry and hindered its true understanding — an understanding that must come from the heart, not the mind. Herder never tired of stressing the need for an intuitive approach to the Old Testament, that candid voice from mankind's childhood age. To understand it like a child understands the voice of his father and a lover the voice of his bride, one must become a shepherd with the shepherds and an oriental with the orientals.⁹³

With Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752-1827) and Johann Philipp Gabler (1753-1826) we reach the logical terminus for our examination of progress in Old Testamental scholarship. As a consequence of their work the concept of myth became indispensable in the steadily more intricate studies undertaken primarily in Germany. In 1779 Eichhorn chose a journal of biblical and oriental scholarship to publish anonymously a long dissertation on the first three chapters of Genesis. The succinct title, *Urgeschichte*, flashed, as it were, a signal. Here the Pentateuch was to be treated strictly as *Geschichte*, but as a new kind of history. It was a historical source presented in language germane to mankind's pristine age of myth. Gabler, who had been a student of the precocious Eichhorn although their ages were about the same, re-edited the work in 1790-93. With Gabler's own copious additions, it now filled three volumes and more than 1500 pages. While Eichhorn had set about boldly and achieved a comprehensive treatment in broad outline, Gabler added introductions and notes, not always uncritical of his master, but usually devastating in his discussion of scores of studies written by colleagues who disagreed with Eichhorn.

Eichhorn had read Herder's works with loving admiration, but he owed at least as much to Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729-1812), a classical scholar whose work on Greek myths had laid the theoretical and practical groundwork for modern mythology.⁹⁴ Eichhorn had been Heyne's student and was now applying his methods and criteria to the Old Testament. As a case in point, we might look at the

⁹² Johann Gottfried Herder, *Vom Geist der ebräischen Poesie in Sämtliche Werke*, ed. B. Suphan (Berlin 1877-1913) XI 314f. Cf. the English transl. by James Marsh (Burlington 1833) I 114.

⁹³ J.G. Herder, *Sämtliche Werke* cit., e.g. X 14f., 145ff. XI 165ff. Hartlich and Sachs, *Der Ursprung des Mythosbegriffes* cit. 47-53. Kraus, *Geschichte ... des Alten Testaments* cit. 116ff.

⁹⁴ See below pp. 284-88.

analysis of Genesis 3.1-5, which fills several dozens of pages in Eichhorn's and Gabler's opus. According to the biblical text, the snake converses with Eve and actually persuades her to eat the forbidden fruit. Now snakes do not talk to humans. Also, it simply would not do to offer allegorical explanations, which had been the common solution whenever the literal meaning raised worrisome questions. Comparison with Greek and oriental mythologies showed that allegorical language was a product of late reflection, and the tale gave every indication of being among the most archaic in the Bible. Thus the snake was not Satan; Satan was not mentioned in the story and had no place in the primitive mental world of its author. Nor had the philosophical problem of the origins of evil. It was not until the Babylonian Exile that the Jews became acquainted with the Chaldean concept of theodicy.⁹⁵

On the contrary, the snake's tale was a typical myth and, as such, exhibited the thinking and language of the childhood of mankind. It answered to Heyne's criteria for mythical thinking⁹⁶ in that it employed personification — fear becomes a snake —, dramatization — the snake talks — and anthromorphization — God also talks and possesses a physical presence from which Adam is trying to hide. Neither Eichhorn nor Gabler were prepared to reject completely the presence of facts in Adam's and Eve's tale, and both, especially Gabler, agonized over their relationship to other parts of the story that were purposely created to answer philosophical questions about the beginnings of the world and the origin of evil. In view of these latter elements both eventually termed the story a "philosophical" rather than a "historical" myth.⁹⁷ In the end Gabler believed that he ought to give a summary of what one could still hold to be factual in the biblical account of the first parents. His points were: the separate creations of Adam and Eve as fully-grown adults, their wonderment while watching a tree and a snake, the sudden awakening of feelings of shame and guilt and, in general, their progress from mental infancy to adult toil and copulation. Or was it all just a fable

⁹⁵ Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, *Urgeschichte*, introd. and notes by Johann Philipp Gabler (Altdorf-Nuremberg 1790-93) II 137ff., esp. 146-51.

⁹⁶ Eichhorn and Gabler, *Urgeschichte* cit. II 154f., 169-71, 261-64. Hartlich and Sachs, *Der Ursprung des Mythosbegriffes* cit. 28f. See below p. 286f.

⁹⁷ Eichhorn and Gabler, *Urgeschichte* cit. II 161-63, 173-97, 481-96, 538-53. Hartlich and Sachs, *Der Ursprung des Mythosbegriffes* cit. 18f., 34-38. David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, transl. George Eliot, ed. P.C. Hodgson (Philadelphia 1972) 66 (§ 12) and passim.

(*Sage*) to depict the “general development of mankind?” Gabler found that he must not decide. Neither of the two alternatives was demonstrably wrong, and being a theologian, he believed he had to incline towards historicity.⁹⁸ His quandary is touching and also typical. When possible, the Christian was still under obligation to retain the literal truth of Scripture, but when that pious struggle ended in defeat one would find solace in the discovery of historical and philosophical myths. Such myths need not be taken as true in the literal sense; nor would they need to reflect a specific revelation. But they were still the fruits of providence, for God had bestowed upon primitive man that rare gift of mythical thinking and expression. This is what gave Eichhorn and Gabler the courage to ask on hundreds of pages over and over again the question: how much is history; how much is myth?

V

Blurring the Division-Line

With Eichhorn’s and Gabler’s adaptation of Heyne’s criteria a workable method of separating mythical and historical subject matter in the Old Testament had been launched. This method continued to be refined by scholars following Eichhorn and Gabler, and their studies began to reach an educated public beyond the strictly academic circles. Other schools of thought, however, continued to obstruct progress towards a clear distinction between Old Testament *historia* and *fabula*. In a variety of ways traditional views proved stolidly resistant. New developments in the nineteenth century cannot be properly assessed,

⁹⁸ Eichhorn and Gabler, *Urgeschichte* cit. II 611-18, cf. II 56f. This is “*was noch mit einigem Schein als wahres Factum in der Urgeschichte angesehen werden kann.*” (II 611) “*Die Sage ... stimmt mit den nothwendigen Gesetzen der successiven Entwicklung der Menschheit genau überein.*” (II 617f.) “*Man nimmt entweder alles das für historische Wahrheit an, was ... nicht nothwendig für ein blosses Philosophem gehalten werden muss; oder man hält die ganze Einkleidung für Philosophem, und nur den zum Grunde liegenden Hauptsatz für in der wahren Geschichte gegründet. ... Welche von beiden den Vorzug verdiene, getraue ich mich nicht zuversichtlich zu entscheiden (ob ich gleich, als Theologe, mehr zur ersteren Erklärungsart hinneigen werde): denn keine von beiden ist erweislich falsch.*” (II 602f.)

unless we are aware of a diversity of challenges still capable of blurring the division-line.

To take one example, great obstinacy was shown in efforts to uphold the historicity of the Deluge and also the precise date traditionally assigned to it. As time went on, those who accepted the biblical account as literally true in all particulars found that they had to deal with a growing number of rational conundrums. In his *Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1684, Latin version 1681), a work that was read throughout the eighteenth century in many editions and reprinted as late as 1826, Thomas Burnet produced arguments that did not involve miracles and yet did not restrict the geographical reach of the Flood.⁹⁹ On the other hand, the theory of a partial rather than universal Flood, to which we had seen La Peyrère subscribe, gained steadily wider acceptance, even in traditionalist Christian circles. While alleviating some problems — the quantity of water required, the presence of all animal species in the ark, and so on — it also created new ones. It contradicted the blunt statement of Genesis 7.21 that “all flesh died.” It failed to explain how the water could be contained in one region over many months and why not a single person was able to walk away from the inundated area. In the face of such puzzles it was comforting to cling at least to solid dates. The great *Encyclopédie* (1751-80) surveyed various views of the Deluge in a long and restrained article, but had no room for any questioning of the traditional date of 1656 after the Creation.

By contrast, the entry on the Deluge in the seventh edition of the Brockhaus *Real-Encyklopädie* (1827) is pointedly short. It still mentioned the traditional year, 1656 from the Creation, adding that according to Denis Petau this meant 2327 B.C., while according to Johannes von Müller it meant 3547 B.C. But then the Brockhaus turned to the Flood traditions of other ancient nations. All belonged to the prehistoric age of myth and had been handed down orally for a thousand years and more, before they were recorded in writing. The article ended with a single bibliographical reference that tells all: Philipp Buttmann’s lecture “On the Myth of the Deluge.” We have earlier glanced at Buttmann’s lecture.¹⁰⁰ He cautiously assumed an original myth originating in India. As it migrated, various peoples

⁹⁹ Francis C. Haber, *The Age of the World. Moses to Darwin* (Baltimore 1959) 71-83. Allen, *The Legend of Noah* cit. 96-100. For other relevant evidence see *The Flood Myth*, ed. Dundes cit.

¹⁰⁰ See above p. 254f.

associated it with memories of flood disasters in their own regions and adapted it accordingly. Buttmann noted that Genesis accorded a much longer duration to the calamity than did other accounts. He suggested that all references to time were likely late additions to the original myth, which, typically, had included none at all.¹⁰¹ Such modern views, however, were a long way from gaining universal acceptance. In 1845-46 the fourth edition of Dom Calmet's Bible dictionary still maintained that since reports of the Deluge could be gathered from all known nations it must have been universal. For good measure, the traditional date of the Flood was also retained.¹⁰²

There is today no lack of people willing to claim that the biblical accounts are true in the literal sense. In intellectual history, however, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627-1704) is often presented as a late — and possibly the greatest — champion in the losing battle to save confidence in the Bible's literal truth. His *Discours sur l'histoire universelle*, first published in 1681, continued to be read with exceptional tenacity. Bossuet, of course, is a classic of French literature, but none of his other works can match the close to two hundred editions and impressions of the *Discours*, published in the course of the nineteenth century, that are now preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris. The very fact that the book was then extensively in use as a school text tells a good deal about the notions that generations of French youths had implanted in their minds.

The bishop of Meaux and tutor of Louis XIV's only son was a complex character. A successful courtier, he could yet be courageous in defense of controversial causes and stubborn in defense of lost ones. Sure of himself and his faith and implacable to opponents, he was, none the less, conscious of his weaknesses. For Bossuet to serve God was to do battle for God's truth, but above all it was pure joy. He revered the Bible, but he also loved it. The Old Testament, no less than the New, was the Word of God; it was filled with Messianic prophecies and infinitely above human suspicion. It was also the history of the universe and of mankind. Moses, that great man, had been chosen to collect the records of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, or rather the history of God's own interventions in the sphere he had assigned to man — "God, who can do and undo as he pleases, who gives nature its laws and then, when he wishes,

¹⁰¹ *Allgemeine deutsche Real-Encyklopädie für gebildete Stände*, 7th ed. (Leipzig 1827) s.v. "Sündflut." Buttmann, *Mythologus* cit. I, esp. 183f., 188, 190.

¹⁰² Calmet, *Dictionnaire ... de la Bible*, 4th ed. cit., II 86-102, here 99.

overturns them.”¹⁰³ This was the truth, sublime and yet elementary, that Spinoza and Richard Simon had failed to see. They knew Hebrew, which Bossuet did not. They had found a handful of later interpolations in the Pentateuch; what did it matter? The Vulgate — indeed, any Bible — harboured all the vital truth a Christian needed.

In his *Discours sur l'histoire universelle*, written originally for the enlightenment of the French Dauphin, Bossuet undertook to demonstrate the unchallengeable validity of sacred history. The book is no more a straight world chronicle than Augustine's *De civitate Dei*, which was its model. Bossuet wanted the Dauphin to understand, not what man had done, but what man needed to know about God and his actions. That vital knowledge included the standard chronological summary of events from the Creation to the time of Alexander the Great. By the end of the seventeenth century, to give such a summary had become a difficult task. Through two revisions of the *Discours*, Bossuet struggled to answer the challenges of the secularist lobby. He used John Marsham's *Chronicus canon Aegyptiacus* (1672), which offered a comprehensive treatment of the Egyptian dynasties with only a token effort to subject them to Old Testament chronology. Of the Greek historians the only ones to be trusted a little were Herodotus and especially Xenophon, whose account, Bossuet thought, was the one most compatible with the Old Testament. It was true that the biblical references to historical events outside Palestine were for the most part not confirmed by the Greek authors. But then so much of Greek literature had been lost that no conclusions could be drawn from what had remained.¹⁰⁴ The concept of sacred history did not condone any compromises. What is true must be true literally, and for truth's sake one must stand against the tide. Bossuet certainly did.

Bossuet, to be sure, did not claim to be an expert in historical chronology. By the end of the Early Modern Age all efforts to determine the beginning of man, or even of the world, by means of disciplined historical scholarship had failed. The learned chronologers had to stand back and make room for geologists, and it was the scientists who would henceforward have to deal with the anxieties of traditional believers.¹⁰⁵ These latter certainly needed reassurance, and one way to impart it was to refer them to the supremacy of the

¹⁰³ Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* 2.1-2. Cf. Hazard, *The European Mind* cit. 198-216.

¹⁰⁴ Bossuet, *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* 1.7.

¹⁰⁵ See below pp. 371-75.

heart over the mind. At the threshold of the Romantic period, François-Auguste de Chateaubriand (1768-1848) was absurd only when he tried to reason. In his *Génie du Christianisme* (1802) he devoted a chapter to the chronology of the Old Testament and took issue with the modern “savants.” They claimed that natural and human history showed that the world was too old for biblical chronology to make sense. They were wrong, of course, but Chateaubriand did not argue his case. He merely presented a long list of perplexing problems and contradictions in the source texts, with which the chronologers must grapple. Without considering that quite a few of these problems had been solved, he declared the learned endeavours for hopeless and chaotic. “Even the savants will have to admit that only the historical books of the Jews offer a chronology that is simple, regular and enlightening.” Why then look for a better guide to historical truth? In the conclusion of his work Chateaubriand reiterated that “all so-called proofs for the great age of the world can be refuted.”¹⁰⁶

Whether the Old Testament or any other text is ultimately due to divine revelation is, and will always be, a matter of personal belief. This is why Chateaubriand’s appeal to the heart has retained validity. On the other hand, to prove divine inspiration by means of correct reasoning based on human knowledge was a pursuit that had eventually to be abandoned. Among the leaders of this losing battle was Gottlob Christian Storr (1746-1805), head of the conservative Tübingen school of theologians. He bravely soldiered on to show, whenever possible, that biblical statements were authentic, correct and even rational. He was among the last scholars to claim that Paul was in fact the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews.¹⁰⁷ He also argued that the apostles acted and taught invariably under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Although one could not be sure that any of God’s actions overruled the laws of nature since these laws were as yet incompletely understood, God could overrule them any time he chose.¹⁰⁸ But even Storr could not completely ignore the work of rationalists like

¹⁰⁶ François René de Chateaubriand, *Génie du Christianisme ou Beautés de la Religion chrétienne* (Paris 1802) I 129-34 (part 1.4.1) and IV 315 (part 3.6.12). Cf. Haber, *The Age of the World* cit. 188-90.

¹⁰⁷ Gottlob Christian Storr, *Pauli Brief an die Hebräer*, 2nd revised ed. (Tübingen 1809) Introduction. Cf. Hartlich and Sachs, *Der Ursprung des Mythosbegriffes* cit. 41f.

¹⁰⁸ Gottlob Christian Storr, *Lehrbuch der christlichen Dogmatik*, German transl. with additional notes by C.C. Flatt (Stuttgart 1803) 317-20. The work was originally published in 1793 as *Doctrinae christianae pars theórica*.

Christian Wolff and Semler,¹⁰⁹ nor that of mythologists like Heyne and Eichhorn. In the controversy over Eve's fall he took a position which at first glance showed some similarity with that of Eichhorn. Both argued that the snake was real, but where Eichhorn understood its conversation with Eve (Genesis 3.1-5) as dramatization of a real experience, typical of mythical times, Storr insisted that Satan took advantage of the snake's presence to seduce Eve. Eve, who watched the snake eating from the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge — an interpretation often given to Genesis 3.6 — inferred that the animal's ability to speak was the result of that eating. Having thus taught Eve to think rationally, Storr proceeded to teach God to speak in metaphors. When God sentenced the snake to crawl on its belly and eat dust (Genesis 3.14), he did not address the snake, which was a real snake, but Satan, for it was his voice that Eve had heard, assuming that she was conversing with the snake. To Satan God announced "a punishment which no unreasoning animal would ever be able to suffer: shame and terror will follow you for ever."¹¹⁰

Continued confusion of *historia* with *fabula* could result not only from the work of stalwart defenders of literal truth and divine inspiration, but also from that of some their most determined opponents. A curious example is Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768). Against all odds he also found that it served his purpose to present the characters of the Pentateuch as historical and many of their actions as facts. Reimarus' purpose, however, was perverse. He taught Hebrew language and literature in his native Hamburg. In the wake of the English Deists and Christian Wolff, he became a respected advocate of natural religion, unpopular with the conservative theologians, but otherwise well respected. In his handbook of natural theology, which ran to seven editions, he frequently took issue with such dreaded radicals as Spinoza and Julien de Lamettrie. In the privacy of a small circle of intimate friends, however, he was himself furiously and savagely hostile to biblical religion in all its forms. From about 1745 he was writing and reworking a manuscript that was definitely not for print. Not until after his death were some fragments published anonymously by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. These *Fragmente des Wolfenbüttelschen Ungenannten* (1774-78) immediately

¹⁰⁹ See below pp. 267-69.

¹¹⁰ Storr, *Lehrbuch* cit. 424-26; cf. Eichhorn and Gabler, *Urgeschichte* cit. II 264-73 and above p. 257f.

aroused a storm of controversy. Reimarus' complete manuscript was finally edited and published in 1972.¹¹¹

The Genesis was Reimarus' first target. In keeping with his private beliefs, he sought to demonstrate that it "offered absolutely no basis for a supernatural order of grace and salvation."¹¹²

Evidently, the [Pentateuch] historiographer just wants to support the proud conviction of the Jews that they are a chosen people; therefore he credits their patriarchs with supernatural intercourse with God. ... And we Christians blindly accept these Jewish pretences ... to the point of ignoring the *chronique scandaleuse* of those champions of their faith.¹¹³

As Reimarus busies himself as the eager chronicler of that *chronique scandaleuse*, he falls, however, victim to an inner contradiction in his endeavours. On the one hand, he is the apostle of his natural religion and demonstrates, blow by blow, cleverly, even brilliantly, the patent absurdity of many details of the biblical narrative. The conclusion seems inevitable that not a word is true of what we are told about the descendants of Adam and their circumstances. But presently Reimarus himself steps in to prevent that conclusion. From rational scrutiny he turns to ethics and, blow by blow, demonstrates the shocking immorality of these same patriarchs. Now for the reader to be duly scandalized, the presumption must be that the culprits and their offences are real. If they were fictional, they would share the fate of the Greek gods and demi-gods. Once assigned to the realm of *fabula*, the wicked deeds of the Olympians just remained a cause for mirth.

Reimarus cannot help but foster that presumption of reality. He calls the author of the Genesis tales about the patriarchs a "historiographer" — just as it used to be before the Age of Reason. He finds it ludicrous that in 2 Peter 2.5 Noah is called a "preacher of righteousness" — Noah, that "insensitive individual," who

¹¹¹ Hermann Samuel Reimarus, *Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes*, ed. Gerhard Alexander (Frankfurt 1972). Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Werke* ed. Herbert G. Göpfert et al. (Munich 1970 -79) VII 311-604: *Lessings Reimarus-Veröffentlichungen*. Cf. *Reimarus: Fragments*, ed. Charles H. Talbert, transl. Ralph S. Fraser (Philadelphia 1970).

¹¹² Reimarus, *Apologie* cit. I 215: "... dass nichts darin enthalten sey, was eine übernatürliche seligmachende Heils-ordnung ausmachen könnte."

¹¹³ Reimarus, *Apologie* cit. I 264.

builds the ark (*Kasten*) uniquely for himself and does not plead with God on behalf of anyone, nor warn any of his fellow men. Stealthily he sneaks into his ark and, if only he can save his own skin, he does not shed a tear as he watches the whole world perish.¹¹⁴

Sarah is “jealous” and “pining for offspring, hysterical,” while Abraham, her husband,

takes it easy. He is told to take a servant girl as his concubine? Very well, he sleeps with her. He is told to cast her out? Very well, pregnant though she is, he lets her wander off into the desert — to perish there, if needs be. He is told to take her back and sleep with her again? At your service, madam.¹¹⁵

Of the seven fragments published by Lessing only the third offers a full analysis of a passage from the Old Testament. This is Reimarus’ demolition of the crossing of the Red Sea,¹¹⁶ which quickly became an object of particular abhorrence as well as lasting admiration. But does it do Reimarus much credit? He certainly implies that the whole tale is not to be believed. Most of his long-winded argument hinges around two details of the biblical account. First, when they left Egypt, the sons of Israel numbered 600 000 arms-bearing men. (“Arms-bearing” is how Reimarus interprets the men “on foot” or “on the march” of Exodus 12.37). Second, the parting of the waters, the crossing of the Israelites and the drowning of the Egyptian pursuers — all happened in one night. One is reminded of Kircher as one reads Reimarus’ detailed statistical calculations of the number of soldiers and other folk, of cows and sheep, chariots and supply vehicles that must have crossed the bottom of the Red Sea in just a few hours. As Kircher had exercised his mathematical skills to show that Genesis was literally true, Reimarus used them to prove that it was absurd. Only, why did he want to dwell so much on two particulars, neither of them essential for a detached examination of the tale, which, after all, reflects a historical fact, the Jewish exodus from eastern Egypt? The last word here is fittingly left to Herder. It is with this kind of scientific quibbling over literal detail in mind that Herder urged his readers to “forget physics and geodesy of modern times and look at

¹¹⁴ Reimarus, *Aologie* cit. I 210-13.

¹¹⁵ Reimarus, *Apologie* cit. I 230.

¹¹⁶ Reimarus, *Apologie* cit. I 299-326. Lessing, *Werke* cit. VII 388-98 (a shorter version).

these pictures, appreciating them as the earth's old poetry of nature."¹¹⁷

That a rational argumentation in support of the inspired character of Scripture survived into the nineteenth century was to some considerable degree due to the theory of accommodation. If Moses, Jesus and the other biblical 'witnesses' had deliberately attuned their words to the mental horizon and social custom of their respective contemporaries, whom, after all, they wanted to reach in the first place, two things followed. First, their words expressed their intention in a modified fashion and therefore need not be taken for true in the literal sense. To use once more the example of Eve and the snake, there need not actually have been a conversation between the woman and a reptile. Second, a biblical text, although not literally true, could still convey timeless truth of a deeper kind. Eve, as her Hebrew name suggests, might not be an individual person. The voice of temptation, to which she listened, might speak to the human race at large. It might come from an evil power, Satan, or from the depth of each person's mind. The crucial point is that for accommodation to work a belief in divine inspiration is indispensable. Accommodation could dispense with supernatural intervention but not with revelation. Ultimately it was not the witnesses who adjusted their words, but God who meted out his revelations attuned to the mental capacities of each successive generation. He had revealed himself to the children of Israel in appropriate fashion, and so he would do to modern man, who had the gift of subjecting God's word to philological and rational analysis. In that sense Johann Lorenz Schmidt (1702-49), an admirer of Christian Wolff, set out to produce a "free translation" of the whole Bible into the language of contemporary science and philosophy. He stated as his guiding principle that "the author's intentions must be expressed according to the rules of the [translator's] own language"¹¹⁸ The Babylonian "tower with its top in the heavens" (Genesis 11.4) in Schmidt's translation simply becomes "a very high tower." Rather than "raining down fire and brimstone from the skies on Sodom and Gommorah," the Lord has to be content with "directing a terrible

¹¹⁷ Herder, *Vom Geist der ebräischen Poesie* in *Werke* cit. XI 288. Echoing Herder, Gabler also emphasized the uselessness of "physics and mathematics" for an understanding a document ("*Urkunde*") as old as Genesis; Eichhorn and Gabler, *Urgeschichte* cit. I 8.

¹¹⁸ *Die göttlichen Schriften vor den Zeiten des Messie Jesus. Der erste Theil worinnen die Gesetze der Iisraelen enthalten sind nach einer freyen Übersetzung ...* (Wertheim 1735) Preface, 25; Schmidt's name is not mentioned.

storm (*ein entsetzliches Wetter*), which set everything alight,” to those cities. And rather than “turning into a pillar of salt,” Lot’s wife “was caught by the fire and afterwards lay prostrate like an effigy of stone, steamed all over with resinous vapours” (Genesis 19.24, 26). This is, of course, an extreme example; even Schmidt’s contemporaries thought he was going too far. In 1737 an imperial edict ordered him to be jailed. He escaped later to Hamburg, but publication of his Bible ceased after the first volume containing the Pentateuch.

If accommodation cannot be posited without an a priori belief in divine revelation, it can, on the other hand, be seen as supplying a tool for the identification both of unhistorical and unspiritual material in Scripture. Spinoza had used that tool to excuse the presence of superstition, folklore and naively inadequate concepts of God.¹¹⁹ In this way, the accommodation theory facilitated the advent of biblical mythology. Beyond that, however, the mythologists had to reject accommodation as an improper exegetical device. It created an artificial gulf between sublime ideas and their deliberately simplified expression, whereas in myth archaic thinking and expression were fused in simple harmony. To the archaic mind the snake was an animal that threatened evil in the physical sense. Its conversation with Eve was dramatic reality. To Eichhorn and his followers myths were not divinely inspired; they were the candid expression of a mode of thinking that had its place in a divine order of things.¹²⁰

At the crossroads of accommodation theory and mythology, Eichhorn and Gabler had to part company with Johann Salomo Semler (1725-91), although they acknowledged the work of the somewhat older Semler as the turning point, where German theology finally began to be reconciled to contemporary science and philosophy. It was Semler who saw to it that all three parts of Richard Simon’s *Histoire critique du Nouveau Testament* became available in a careful German translation.¹²¹ He also argued, in the sense of Spinoza and Hume, that miracles could be ignored without detriment to the Christian

¹¹⁹ See above pp. 249-51.

¹²⁰ Hartlich und Sachs, *Der Ursprung des Mythosbegriffes* cit. 20-47, 165-67. Kraus, *Geschichte .. des Alten Testaments* cit. 147-51.

¹²¹ Semler himself revised the translation, which was by a former student of his, wrote an introduction and notes and had the work published in three volumes (Halle 1776-80). Before this edition, only a German epitome of Richard’s *Histoire critique*, both of the Old and New Testaments, had been available (Goslar 1713).

faith.¹²² Since he knew Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, he may well have owed his interest in accommodation in part to Spinoza.¹²³

Semler used accommodation as a lethal weapon to destroy the conservative tenet that all texts of the Old and New Testaments were uniformly inspired. Perhaps his most influential study was an examination of the biblical canon. It stated that texts had become canonical as a result of historical accidents rather than their intrinsic quality. "In all books of that so-called canon passages and parts of the oral formulation and its editing" were to be found that "pass away, as it were, together with those times, ... they are gone, together with the original listeners or readers."¹²⁴ This was not to deny inspiration and timeless validity as such, but to assert — a crucial point for Semler — that modern readers were free to choose what biblical texts were relevant to them and, indeed, had a responsibility to do so. Time and again he emphasized the fundamental difference between the "Holy Writ," which became eventually canonized in the Bible as we know it, and the much more restricted "Word of God," receptacle of inspiration.¹²⁵ Under scrutiny, biblical texts revealed unmistakable differences of orientation. In the New Testament, for instance, Matthew had written specifically "for the Jews of Arabia and other distant regions" rather than for "men of all times." John, by contrast, reported fewer miracles and more of Jesus' own pronouncements, and so set his sight on readers who were "already accustomed to meditation about the truth."¹²⁶ Turning to the Old Testament, Semler was satisfied that the huge portions filled with the Judaic laws had been dismissed by the Apostle Paul. His own indignant disapproval was directed to all the historical books, also to Esther, that "Jewish novel," Ruth, that "little tale," Nehemiah, Ezra and, of course, the Song of Songs. By and large, these contained "nothing of God" and

¹²² Johann Salomo Semler, *Beantwortung der Fragmente eines Ungenannten*, 2nd ed. (Halle 1780) 340-54.

¹²³ Baruch Spinoza, *Theologisch-politischer Traktat* transl. and ed. Carl Gebhardt, 5th ed. (Hamburg 1955) xxxii (Gebhardt's introduction). Semler also undertook a new ed. of the *Philosophia Sacrae Scripturae interpres* by Spinoza's close friend, Lodewijk Meijer (Halle 1776).

¹²⁴ Johann Salomon Semler, *Abhandlung von freier Untersuchung des Canon*, ed. Heinz Scheible (Gütersloh 1967) 40. This is a modern edition of the programmatic first part of Semler's work with that title, published in 1771 and revised 1776. Cf. Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament* (Oxford 1987) 16f.

¹²⁵ Semler, *Abhandlung von freier Untersuchung* cit. 27f., 43, 57, 85.

¹²⁶ Semler, *Abhandlung von freier Untersuchung* cit. 83.

were of no consequence to modern Christians. Rather they helped to perpetuate among the Jews themselves "the spiritual blindness and crude ignorance," which were sadly typical of the common run of that race. So sweeping are Semler's condemnations that one begins to wonder how much, or little, of the Old Testament retained any value for him. In passing, at least, he listed some exceptions from the general rule of inconsequence: the Psalms, in particular, Solomon's prayer at the inauguration of the Temple (1 Kings 8.12-53) and even some songs in the historical books.¹²⁷

Modern readers of Semler and also of Reimarus will frequently encounter formulations that, by the standards of our own use of language, smack of Antisemitism. There certainly is a clear tendency to write off the entire Old Testament as quintessentially Jewish and unprofitable or indeed outright dangerous to Christians. While obviously not new, this tendency, taken up with a vengeance by Schleiermacher and Hegel, could not fail to make an impact on the German intelligentsia down to the early twentieth century.¹²⁸ Like other prejudiced positions discussed on the preceding pages, Antisemitism was bound to obstruct an objective appraisal both of historical fact and myth in the Old Testament.

¹²⁷ Semler, *Abhandlung von freier Untersuchung* cit. 40-43, 51, 54-56. In the course of these arguments one finds one of the earliest occurrences of the term "mythology" with reference to the Old Testament: "Man kann daher unter den Juden ebensowohl eine Mythologie annehmen und sammeln als unter andern Völkern, ehe ihre Cultur zunahm." Semler does not, however, develop the point further; cf Hartlich and Sachs, *Der Ursprung des Mythosbegriffes* cit. 165-67.

¹²⁸ Kraus, *Geschichte ... des Alten Testaments* cit. 170-73, 189-91, 432f.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE EARLY MODERN AGE AND THE ORIGINS OF ROME

I

Prehistory Defies the Chronologers

The progress in Old Testament scholarship may now be compared to Early Modern views on the origins of Rome. Such an undertaking is facilitated by the traditional concern of classical scholars for the history of their profession. We are dealing here with a discipline that has a long and proud tradition of recording and analyzing its own advances. General histories of classical scholarship as well as specific surveys of the historiography of the origins of Rome have been available for considerable time and have recently been brought up to date.¹ While conflicts of opinion and controversies were plentiful, some general lines of interpretation were persistent and in a way predictable. Critical appraisals of Roman history were nothing new. A mild breeze of scepticism had blown in all the way from classical Antiquity. On its passage to the Early Modern Age the breeze stiffened. The Christian Fathers and, to a lesser degree, the Renaissance writers added their own doubts and queries to those of their predecessors. By contrast, the patriarchs of the Old Testament were protected by a mighty bastion. The narrative of their actions was divinely inspired; we have seen what courage and strength were needed to argue that it fell short of absolute truth. The heroes of Troy and Rome lacked the protective mantle of sacred history; to challenge them might be proof of irreverence, but it did not lead to charges of heresy.

¹ The following works are representative: Arnold H.L. Heeren, *Geschichte des Studiums der classischen Literatur seit dem Wiederaufleben des Wissenschaften* (Göttingen 1797-1801); John Edwin Sandys, *A History of Classical Scholarship* (Cambridge 1903-08); Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *A History of Classical Scholarship*, transl. Alan Harris (London 1982; first German ed. 1921); Rudolf Pfeiffer, *A History of Classical Scholarship from 1300 to 1850* (Oxford 1976); Grafton, *Defenders of the Text* cit. On the origins of Rome: Albert Schwegler, *Römische Geschichte* (Tübingen 1853-58) I 73-154; Corrado Barbagallo, *Il problema delle origini di Roma da Vico a noi* (Milan 1926); Erasmus, *The Origins of Rome* cit.

The great achievements of classical scholarship in the Early Modern Age are associated with such names as Josephus Justus Scaliger (1540-1609), Justus Lipsius (1547-1606), Philippus Cluverius (1580-1622), Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), Gerardus Vossius (1577-1649), Jacobus Perizonius (1651-1715), Jacobus Gronovius (1645-1716) and Richard Bentley (1662-1742). In the preceding Renaissance period some hitherto missing texts by Latin classics of prime importance had resurfaced, among them Cicero, Livy, Tacitus, Plautus and Quintilian. Such sensational discoveries were now no longer likely to emerge from the well-searched libraries, but immense diligence was lavished on producing sophisticated editions of the principal authors of Antiquity. These would form the source of a continuing flow of school texts and vernacular translations. At the same time many minor writers were edited for the first time, and particularly corrupted texts emerged in comprehensible form. Scaliger's reconstruction of Eusebius' chronicle, for instance, was a feat of learning and bold combination, proven right two centuries later when the formerly missing part came to light in an old Armenian translation.² The Early Modern Age was marked by a growing emphasis on critical reasoning which, on occasion, produced spates of religious scepticism and historical Pyrrhonism. More commonly, the quest for accurate and complete documentation was pursued to the point of obsession. One way to satisfy the heightened demand for accuracy was chronological scholarship. While necessarily cognate to the field of classical philology, chronology tended to become a discipline all to itself.

In the preceding chapter we had seen how the chronologers bestowed a sense of time upon the historical consciousness hitherto preoccupied with anachronistic examples. We had also witnessed the chronologers' slow retreat from Genesis amid the general demise of sacred history as a scholarly pursuit. Chronology also played its part in the changes occurring on the secular side of ancient history. To concentrate on one aspect, by the end of the eighteenth century our familiar dating system of B.C. and A.D. years, after centuries of ancillary employment, was advancing to predominance and would soon enjoy the monopoly to which we are now accustomed. Due to its common use today, it is easily overlooked that this system is unique and extraordinary. It has a fixed point in its centre — Christ's birth —

² Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship from 1300* cit. 118.

but is open-ended both towards the future and the past. Its Christocentricity alone might call to mind that it was conceived from the depth of the *anima naturaliter christiana*, but the opening towards an indefinite future, too, is in conformity with Scripture. "Heaven and earth will pass away ... But about that day and hour no one knows" (Matthew 24.35-36). While not unique, the concept of an open future is not so common as one might think. In the past the most popular system of dating was by eras, for instance eras comprised of the regnal years of successive rulers. The era is finite and tends to be viewed in retrospect, when both its beginning and its end are firmly set. The true uniqueness of our common system, however, lies in its backward reach towards an infinite past. It lacks the commencing point characteristic of all its rivals without exception. Unlike its rivals, it could do justice to the dark wasteland at the beginning of human history, when time was mythical and indefinite, before it became historical and measurable.³

Mythical time was not, of course, a concept that Jews and Christians would traditionally have held, familiar as they were with the seven days of Creation; nor was it what the pioneers of B.C. dating aimed for in their strictly pragmatic considerations. B.C. dates had been long in coming.⁴ A few have been found in a work of the eleventh century. More often, albeit still in a minority of places, they were added alongside the more common dates from Creation in the *Flores temporum* (1292), a work written by an anonymous Swabian friar. By introducing them, the anonymous author realized that he was departing from tradition, and he did not do so lightly. One troubling difficulty was that B.C. dates did nothing to relieve the old dilemma whether to calculate the beginning of the world according to the Vulgate, or according to the Septuagint, which meant adding an extra

³ To Herder we owe an early and lucid expression of the concept of mythical time. A hypothetical interlocutor raises objections to his view of Genesis. "But," says the man, "in this case we don't know the age of the world... Indeed, we don't have a chronological beginning of universal history." — "I think so too," is the answer, "but why should we need one? The most ancient history, if it is to be of any use, must be studied as philosophy and poetry, as a kind of mythology. Otherwise it is perfectly ghastly (*die abscheulichste Sache von der Welt*). See *Unterhaltungen und Briefe über die älteste Urkunde*, (1771-72), in Herder, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Suphan cit. VI 186f.

⁴ The following is based on a remarkable article by Anna-Dorothee von den Brincken, "Beobachtungen zum Aufkommen der retrospektiven Inkarnationsära" *Archiv für Diplomatik* 25 (1979) 1-20.

twelve hundred years.⁵ Persistent juxtaposition of B.C. and Creation dates has been traced back to the *Fasciculus temporum* (1474) of Werner Rolevinck, a universal chronicle that was repeatedly translated and many times reprinted. Sethus Calvisius and Denis Petau, two leading chronologers of the seventeenth century, also added the B.C. years regularly to the dates derived from other systems, but made no secret of their lack of enthusiasm for the former.⁶ By contrast, in the second half of the seventeenth century the Jesuit Giovanni Battista Ricciolo opted for single B.C. dates, calculated, where necessary, on the basis of the Septuagint.⁷

Ricciolo remained exceptional for well over a hundred years. Other chronologers continued to be resigned to the necessity of listing dates derived from several systems in parallel columns, changing the system as each period required. In terms of theory, the great leap ahead was due, once more, to the ingenious Joseph Scaliger. As he used date references from a wide variety of sources, he found that he needed to translate them all into one common and uniform system, a sort of chronological Esperanto. The system he inventend for this purpose was the Julian period, a cycle of 7980 Julian years, each measuring 365 ¼ days. The Julian period began in 4713 B.C., that is to say, well before any of the dates of Creation normally proposed by protestants, in Scaliger's own case 4349 B.C. His system, though artificial and ultimately arbitrary, was chosen on the basis of well-founded astronomical considerations and designed to permit ready conversion of most dates recorded in other systems.⁸ It was used by some

⁵ The traditional number of years from Creation to the birth of Christ, stated with some variations, was 3952 according to the Vulgate (based on the Hebrew text), and 5198 according to the Septuagint (and the Vulgate as revised under Clement VIII). Typically, in the *Flores temporum* the B.C. calculation was not used for the earliest times, where the discrepancy between Vulgate and Septuagint is most significant, since they differ widely in the number of years each assigned to the lives of the patriarchs.

⁶ Denis Petau's *Opus de doctrina temporum* first appeared in 1627, but even subsequent revisions (Verona 1734-36, Venice 1757) demonstrate a preference for Scaliger's Julian system, which alone is used in the alphabetical index. Sethus Calvisius' *Opus chronologicum*, first published in 1605, gives precedence to the calculation from the beginning of the world, which is "*omnium praestantissima et maximi momenti*" (p. 118 in the fourth ed., Frankfurt 1650).

⁷ Giovanni Battista Ricciolo, *Chronologia reformata et ad certas conclusiones redacta* (Bologna 1669). Before presenting his "*chronicum magnum*," Ricciolo offers two succinct lines of dates from Creation, one according to the Septuagint, the other according to the Hebrew Bible.

⁸ Grafton, "Joseph Scaliger and Historical Chronology" cit. 162-64, 171. The Julian period was obtained by multiplying the 28-year solar cycle with the 19-year lunar cycle and the 15-year Indiction cycle (established in the Roman Empire for taxation purposes).

historians until the early nineteenth century and continues to have some application for astronomers. The crucial point was Scaliger's insistence on a uniform basis of conversion. Once this principle was accepted, the ultra-scholarly Julian period would eventually be replaced by the B.C.- A.D. system, whose latter half had been in general use for a long time. Unparalleled B.C. dates appeared with growing frequency during the second half of the eighteenth century. In a way, they were in the vanguard of the great drive for uniform measurements, undertaken in the course of the French Revolution. In 1796 Thomas Falconer's *Chronological Tables* still listed Julian and B.C. equivalents, but the introduction shows that in his own thinking Falconer was using B.C. dates all the time.⁹ The change-over to B.C. dates was initiated in the name of scientific chronology. The specialist scholars who began to use them were often relieved to omit the uncertain date of Creation, which had now become dispensable, and with it the equally unreliable dates of the Flood and the Tower of Babel. Normally they did not question the factuality of the events themselves. In the case of Rome, they did not even intend to put the traditional date for Romulus' foundation in jeopardy. But by removing the need for a fixed commencing point, they prepared the public for the inevitable dismissal of the traditional tales.

We had noted how biblical scholars were exposed to the lure of documentation. For the orthodox-minded so much would be gained if the Old Testament, or for that matter the gospels, after rigorous examination could be shown to be authentic documents worthy of trust. Conversely, for the sceptics all was to be gained by proving that they were not. Classical studies progressed similarly. Actually, since the taboo of religious inspiration did not apply when discussing Aeneas and Romulus, critical evaluation of the sources could proceed in a freer and more systematic fashion. To mention just one remarkable example, a method for checking the authenticity of texts, the incidence of corrupt readings and the validity of emendations was developed in the second volume of Jean Le Clerc's *Ars critica*

⁹ Thomas Falconer, *Chronological Tables Beginning with the Reign of Solomon and Ending with the Death of Alexander the Great* (Oxford 1796). Falconer did not even mention that the Bible could not provide any reliable dates prior the construction of Solomon's Temple; he simply took it for granted.

(Amsterdam 1697).¹⁰ Yet, when the historians of early Rome applied such critical methods, they shared a predicament experienced by those who studied the historical books of the Old Testament. Their documents were not original in the straightforward sense of an inscription carved in marble or a charter preserved on a parchment, with seals appended. All that could be debated was the value of secondary sources and the credibility of ancient historiographers. It was an enterprise, to be sure, that deserved to be undertaken methodically. At the beginning of the eighteenth century Jacobus Perizonius, a distinguished classical scholar and representative of early historicism, maintained that the trustworthiness of a text needed to be established by examining its quality in terms of grammar and logic, by pondering the author's age, nationality, education and character, and finally by comparing the statement in question to others by the same author and to similar ones made by different writers. At the same time a collaborator of Christian Thomasius reached — largely sceptical — conclusions on the exodus from Troy and the origins of Rome by discussing, first, the most ancient sources and, secondly, a broad spectrum of the most recent writers.¹¹ The great question, however remained: was there no way to advance beyond the study of secondary sources? To receive an answer, historians had to consult the work of antiquarians.

II

Prehistory Defies the Antiquarians

Like chronology, antiquarian scholarship in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries came as close as it ever would to acquiring the status of an independent discipline. In the nineteenth century both had

¹⁰ Arnaldo Momigliano, "Ancient History and the Antiquarian" *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 13 (1950) 285-315, here 296. The article is reprinted in [Primo] *Contributo alla storia degli studi classici* (Rome 1955) 67-106.

¹¹ Jacobus Perizonius, *Oratio de fide historiarum contra Pyrrhonismum historicum* (Leiden 1702) 38-40; cf. Erasmus, *The Origins of Rome* cit. 75f. and passim. *Observationes selectae*, ed. Thomasius., cit. 3 (1701), Observations 1-3. For this work, and also for Perizonius, see further, below pp. 296-98, 301-3.

to retreat from their autonomous positions and to a large extent were reintegrated into the general field of history, which under the aegis of historicism commanded an all-time height of respect and significance. Perhaps the largest sector of antiquarian interests, however, was absorbed into the new academic discipline of archaeology. For the purposes of this study a simple distinction between antiquarianism and archaeology will be applied. Rather than concentrating on the study of literary sources, antiquarians collected and surveyed official and private documents, inscriptions, coins, vases and statues. They also examined architectural monuments and topographical records. The new sodality of archaeologists would pursue similar interests, but would do so by engaging in deliberate and systematic excavation. One instance of digging with the specific purpose of finding antiquities occurred as early as the third quarter of the sixteenth century, when Pirro Ligorio and his master, Cardinal Ippolito II d'Este, conducted searches at the Villa Adriana and in Tivoli.¹² At the same time, however, and more typically, the sites of ancient Rome were widely used as quarries for new construction. A famous, but still isolated, endeavour of archaeological excavation went underway at Pompeii in 1748. Competitive digging spread throughout the geographical range of the ancient world, after Heinrich Schliemann, in the 1870s, set to work on the sites of Troy and Mycenae. Schliemann went looking for proof that Homer's heroes had existed; instead he uncovered a thousand years of hitherto unknown prehistoric civilization.¹³

We may thus call antiquarians rather than archaeologists the scholars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries whose efforts must be taken into account at this point. Their work was bound to interest historians in the same measure as the latter accepted that literary sources failed to enlighten the end of Troy and the beginnings of Rome. To turn for help to the antiquarians was fitting, for what they had to offer was, and still is, impressive in terms of quantity no less than quality. One could look, for instance, at the *Thesaurus antiquitatum Romanorum* (1694-99) by Johannes Georgius Graevius (1632-1703), twelve imposing folio volumes, richly illustrated with

¹² Erna Mandowsky and Charles Mitchell, *Pirro Ligorio's Roman Antiquities* (London 1963) 2-4.

¹³ Massimo Pallottino, *Che cos'è l'archeologia?* (Florence 1963) 21-38. Bruno Sauer, "Geschichte der Archäologie" in *Handbuch der Archäologie*, ed. Heinrich Bulle et al. (Munich 1913) 80-141. *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Archaeology*, ed. Andrew Sherratt (Cambridge 1980).

maps as well as plates of coins and statues, also of monuments in their current ruined condition together with reconstructions of their original splendour. Graevius had brought together a fine selection of antiquarian work done in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, covering geography and topography, law and constitution, civil and military offices, religion and superstition, weights and measures — in short all spheres of daily life. This impressive stock of erudite knowledge had been assembled by scholars generally unconcerned with the historian's quest for the sequence of events and for causes and effects. Graevius' *Thesaurus* was only one collection among others of similar magnitude and significance. Almost a century earlier Janus Gruterus (1560-1627), encouraged and guided by Joseph Scaliger, had published a momentous collection of Greek and Latin inscriptions.¹⁴ A quarter century after Graevius' *Thesaurus*, a Benedictine of the Saint-Maur congregation, Bernard de Montfaucon (1655-1741) produced his *Antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures* (Paris 1719-24) in ten large folio volumes. With the help of countless plates derived from surviving monuments, Montfaucon illustrated the religious beliefs of the classical world and many aspects of its social life and military organization — much of it reproduced from previously published work by other scholars. On a narrower scope, but of special relevance here, is the work of Raffaello Fabretti (1618-1700). He matched illustrations derived from a monument with the literary accounts of the Trojan War, the fall of Troy and the departure of Aeneas. The question whether these events were real or fictional was explicitly ignored as being irrelevant to the task on hand.¹⁵

Amid the mountains of material piled up by antiquarian scholars, might there not be some morsels that could alleviate the dearth of information about the origins of Rome? The answer, for the time being, was no. So it was stated unequivocally by one who had made

¹⁴ Janus Gruterus, *Inscriptiones antiquae orbis totius Romani* (Heidelberg 1602-3). Gruter's life goes to show that the early stages of antiquarian scholarship must be viewed against the dark background of the religious wars when studious detachment may have offered an escape from the political realities. The son of a religious refugee from Antwerp, Gruter was educated in Cambridge and then taught for thirty years in the University of Heidelberg. Towards the end of his life Heidelberg was sacked by Tilly's army, and most of his personal library together with the famous Palatina was carried off to Rome. See Leonard W. Forster, *Janus Gruter's English Years* (Leiden -London 1967) 5, 141-45 and passim.

¹⁵ Raffaello Fabretti, *De columna Traiani syntagma. Accesserunt: Explicatio veteris tabellae anaglyphae Homeri Iliadem atque ... Ilii excidium continentis...* (Rome 1690) 315-84. The work was first published in Rome, 1683. Fabretti's material was used again by Lorenz Beger, *Bellum et excidium Trojanum* (Berlin-Leipzig 1699).

a conscientious search. Louis de Beaufort (d. 1795) wrote a *Dissertation sur l'incertitude des cinq premiers siècles de l'histoire romaine*, which was first published in 1738. As the title suggests, Beaufort was not rushing in to rescue Aeneas and Romulus from demolition but, nevertheless, he had investigated with great diligence. His premise was that "statues, inscriptions and similar public monuments are of great value, if posterity is to remember outstanding men ... and their services to the state." In view of the many heroes early Rome had produced, such monuments once must have existed in great numbers, Beaufort suggested. But all that remained to be seen in the age of Augustus were a few fakes based on legendary traditions — fakes whose very existence proved that the originals had perished. What was worse, when exceptionally an original survived, as did the armour of the Veientian king Tolumnius, killed in battle by the Roman A. Cornelius Cossus, 428 B.C., Livy did not bother to read the inscription. If he had read it, he would have been obliged to correct the mistaken date he assigned to the event. This trophy was still seen by Augustus in the temple of Jupiter Feretrius. It went without saying that it was now lost, as was the fake armour of the Caeninensian king Akron (Acro), allegedly killed by Romulus and exhibited in the same temple.¹⁶ Beaufort continued his search even after the *Dissertation* had been published. When a second, enlarged edition appeared in 1750 one of its two parts dealt exclusively with the absence of antiquarian evidence ("*disette des monumens*") for the earliest history of Rome. A new section, complete with plates, demonstrated that the study of Roman coins revealed nothing beyond the ridiculous pretensions of powerful families like the Iulii, who claimed descent from Venus and Aeneas.¹⁷

As long as the debate on the origins of Rome remained squarely centered on the ancient historians and their credibility, monuments could only make a negative contribution. Today it is clear that antiquarian scholarship, and subsequently archaeology, did hold the

¹⁶ [Louis de Beaufort], *Dissertation sur l'incertitude des cinq premiers siècles de l'histoire romaine ... par Monsieur L.D.B.* (Utrecht 1738) 61-64. Cf. Livy 1.10.4-7, 4.19-20. Ogilvie, *A Commentary on Livy Books 1-5* cit. 557f., 563-66. Sextus Pompeius 211f., ed. W.M. Lindsay (Leipzig 1913) 203f. Beaufort did not say that Romulus' trophy was a fake, but objects like this must have been in his mind when he referred to the fakes shown in the age of Augustus. In general see Ronald T. Ridley, *Gibbon's Complement: Louis de Beaufort*, Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, Memorie di scienze morali 40:3 (Venice 1986).

¹⁷ Louis de Beaufort, *Dissertation sur l'incertitude des cinq premiers siècles de l'histoire romaine* (The Hague 1750) 113-25. Cf. Erasmus, *The Origins of Rome* cit. 129.

key to more reliable knowledge about early Rome, but for that key to be cut, a different approach was necessary. The new approach was the discovery of pre-Roman Italy, an Italy situated essentially in prehistorical times prior to the fourth century, when the written accounts finally begin to offer some factual information. As eighteenth-century scholars swarmed to gather non-literary evidence, it is with this discovery of pre-Roman Italy that, according to Arnaldo Momigliano, they reaped perhaps the greatest profit to historical knowledge.¹⁸ The work that launched this discovery in grand style was Thomas Dempster's *De Etruria regali* (Florence 1723-26), edited by Thomas Coke from a manuscript written more than a century earlier. Thomas Dempster (d. 1625), a bellicose Scottish Catholic teaching at the University of Bologna, deserves to be called the father of Etruscology. When editing Dempster's work, Coke secured the collaboration of Filippo Buonarroti. To Dempster's epigraphical evidence and his gleanings from literary sources Buonarroti added the appropriate plates, along with his own commentaries. In the quarter century following the publication of *De Etruria regali*, provincial cities like Cortona and Volterra suddenly sprang to life and reclaimed their Etruscan patrimony. They set up academies and museums, and even engaged in some modest excavation activity. Nor were the Etruscans the sole beneficiaries of the newly awakened enthusiasm. The Pelasgians and other tribes supposed to have settled in pre-Roman Italy soon claimed their share of attention. They all would open the path for new hypotheses to complement the Trojan legend, and later on to rival it. Not that it was a path leading steadily forward from myth to history. Especially the Etruscans, whose language even today is largely incomprehensible and whose provenance remains controversial, offered tantalizing material for mythmakers.¹⁹ To begin with, it was inevitable that the standard biblical pedigree would also be applied to pre-Roman Italy, as was done by Scipione Maffei (1675-1755), the great and otherwise sound promoter of the antiquities of his native Verona. Maffei brought himself to believe that the Etruscans had migrated to Italy from Canaan. Hebrew words in their

¹⁸ Momigliano, "Ancient History and the Antiquarians" cit. 91-94, also for what follows here.

¹⁹ Raymond Bloch, *Le Mystère étrusque* (Paris 1956) 4-6. See also: Romolo A. Staccioli, *Gli Etruschi. Mito e realtà* (Rome 1980); Marta Sordi, *Il mito troiano e l'eredità etrusca di Roma* (Milan 1989); Dominique Briquel, *Les Pélasges en Italie. Recherches sur l'histoire de la légende* (Rome 1984).

language and a social structure reminiscent of the twelve tribes of Israel would prove his theory, Maffei argued. The Latini, by contrast, were really the Pelasgians, who had come to Italy from Greece and could ultimately be traced back to Noah's descendant, Peleg.²⁰

Despite their potential for mythmaking, the pre-Italian tribes did not provide early modern Europe with new theories about the origins of Rome; nor did any other objects of antiquarian attention. The discovery of the real prehistorical Rome was the result of purposeful excavations, and these did not begin until late in the nineteenth century. Antiquarian endeavours did, however, immensely encourage the study of ancient art, which in turn required a serious understanding of the ancient myths. That prior even to archaeology, the history of ancient art developed into an autonomous field of study is largely the merit of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-68) and Georg Zoega (1755-1809). A German the first, a Dane the second, both had gone to live in Rome. Winckelmann, in particular, wrought profound change to the aesthetic outlook of Germany and Europe, but he was not curious about historicity and unaware, it seems, of the new approaches to myth that were in the making when he was murdered in Trieste.

Ten years after Winckelmann's tragic end, the Cassel *Société des Antiquités* invited commemorations of the great man and offered a handsome prize for the best entry. Two texts were submitted; one, by Johann Gottfried Herder, had for the most part been written the previous year for another occasion. The other, much shorter, entry was by Christian Gottlob Heyne.²¹ Herder offers a tribute to one great man by another, an appreciation of Winckelmann's merits, written in the consciousness of his own. He does not praise Winckelmann so much as deal, scornfully and defiantly, with German pettiness that first hampered Winckelmann's genius and then acclaimed it in terms of a shallow misunderstanding. Above all, Herder shows how much his own mind owed to Winckelmann's inspiration. Loosely argued, spontaneous, intuitive and sensitive, his essay can best be characterized by the attribute he repeatedly uses for Winckelmann:

²⁰ Francesco Scipione Maffei, *Ragionamento sopra gl'Itali primitivi*, appended to his *Istoria diplomatica* (Mantua 1727). I used the Latin translation by Johann Georg Lotter, *Origenes Etruscae et Latinae* (Leipzig 1731). Cf. Arnaldo Momigliano, *Secondo contributo alla storia degli studi classici* (Rome 1960) 255-71.

²¹ *Die Kasseler Lobschriften auf Winckelmann*, ed. and introd. Arthur Schulz (Berlin 1963).

"*idealisches*."²² The jury had no difficulty in awarding the palm to Herder's rival, whose text is succinct, methodical, scholarly and in part undeniably mean. Heyne knew what he personally owed to Winckelmann; he lauds his achievements with feeling. But he also betrays some jealousy of Winckelmann's fame and some resentment of his carefree life under the sun of Rome. From the northern perspective of Heyne's office in the Göttingen library, everything Italian is seen as grossly deficient. It is precisely his half-suppressed criticism of Winckelmann that is relevant at this point. As Heyne saw it, Winckelmann, at his weakest, carried on the fruitless endeavours of the Italian antiquaries. At his best, he triumphantly surpassed them in his superior knowledge of languages and literature and in the resulting ability to explain ancient works of art in the light of literary texts. It was Winckelmann's greatest achievement "that he directed the study of Antiquity to its proper channel, the study of art."²³ But Winckelmann's outstanding merit was also his limitation. The renovator of antiquarian scholarship was deficient as a historian; he lacked accuracy and he lacked system. Thanks to Winckelmann, "we are now directed to the right path; we are now instructed to examine ancient works of art as works of art." But henceforward Winckelmann had to be left behind; the greatest tribute one could pay him was to explore new approaches. "It would undoubtedly be the finest wreath round your funerary urn, if in renewed memory of you the study of Antiquity — [the whole of Antiquity, not just its art] — were to gain a more reasonable and purposeful shape — that glorious study, which ... is bound to lead to a closer acquaintance with the spirit of the ancients, to an understanding of the notions and ideas of the earlier times, especially their religious practices and institutions."²⁴

Just before offering this accolade, Heyne had singled out the desideratum uppermost in his mind. "What still goes missing ... is, above all, a good book about myth (*die Fabel*).²⁵" There was no lack of manuals of mythology, but none of them was conceived with an authentic understanding of the ancient mind. Myth was the central element in Heyne's own monumental contribution to historical thought. While Winckelmann had directed attention to the mythical age, he too had not himself understood it. The prerequisite for a true insight was the concept of historicism. "Every work of art must be

²² *Die Kasseler Lobschriften* cit, ed. Schulz, 41, 50f.

²³ *Die Kasseler Lobschriften* cit. 21.

²⁴ *Die Kasseler Lobschriften* cit. 25, 27.

seen and judged with the notions and the spirit in which it was created by the artist. That is to say, we must transfer ourselves to his time and dwell amid his contemporaries.”²⁵ Heyne was addressing readers who knew and appreciated Winckelmann. He did not need to point out to them that Winckelmann’s approach to the art of the Greeks and Romans was that of a classicist rather than a historicist, reflecting his own values and feelings rather than those of the ancients.²⁶

III

The Discovery of the Mythical Age

Antiquarian scholarship helped prepare the way towards the discovery of the mythical age. With that discovery we reach a final development in early modern thought that must briefly be considered before we can turn to the specific controversy over the origins of Rome. It is Heyne who takes the place of Columbus in that discovery of the New World of myth. To understand his importance, one may first glance at the work of earlier mythologists; it is indeed a study in contrasts. Bernard de Fontenelle (1657-1757) was a man of many talents. His essay *De l’Origine des fables* stands out amid the lumbering and sometimes voluminous dissertations penned by some of his contemporaries, but it also remains characteristic of a perception, common among the *philosophes*, that had to be abandoned before the new horizons could be sighted. It was written in the last quarter of the seventeenth century — precisely when is controversial — but was not published until 1724 and never became widely accessible. *Fable* is the French word used by Fontenelle throughout his essay for what others might have termed myth, and it seems best to retain his expression. He states categorically that “there is no nation whose history does not begin with *fables*.”²⁷ It is true that he exempts the Jews, God’s chosen

²⁵ *Die Kasseler Lobschriften* cit. 20.

²⁶ Herder also noted that Winckelmann “*selbst kein Grieche werden konnte*” and that his classical ideal was ultimately irrelevant. See *Die Kasseler Lobschriften* cit. 37, 60.

²⁷ Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle, *De l’Origine des fables*, critical ed. by J.-R. Carré (Paris 1932) 33. In addition to Carré’s introduction, see an appreciation and partial transl. of this work in: Burton Feldman and Robert D. Richardson, *The Rise of Modern Mythology 1680-1860*

people, from this general rule, but coming from Fontenelle, this qualification can be written off as a ceremonious bow to convention. Fabulizing was at its prolific best before the introduction of writing. Once recorded in writing, traditions became fixed in the form in which we still read them in our own time. In fact, having as children been thoroughly acquainted with the Greek *fables*, we know them so well that, as reasoning adults, we never pause to wonder about them, as well we might, for they present us with “*un amas de chimères, de rêveries et d'absurdités*.”²⁸ Although he does not actually say this, Fontenelle seems to suggest that we must become aware of the inherent absurdity of the *fables* in order to appreciate that to their original audiences they were no more absurd than fairy tales and Greek myths were to us in our childhood.

Fontenelle asked himself how the *fables* came into existence. The question is significant, although his answer is not as clear as it might be. At first *fables* reflected a factual occurrence, together with a pitifully inadequate attempt to explain phenomena that “*ces pauvres sauvages*” could not understand. Next, seeing the success of such tales, new *fables* would be concocted, which had no longer any basis in fact.²⁹ Fontenelle did not consider the problem whether myths were invented by individual authors or rather a spontaneous product of collective creativity. He did, however, — and this is important — discern a certain lack of deliberate intent in the making of *fables*, and he insisted that those of the ancient world ought to be compared to the tales of primitive tribes in the contemporary one. For instance, he thought he could see “*une conformité étonnante entre les fables des Américains et celles des Grecs*.”³⁰ He is least perceptive when he suggested to his readers how they should look at the *fables*. There was no need to plumb too deeply. What had made the *fables* enjoyable to their earliest audiences was that they could be savoured in the belief that they were true. And we, without this illusion, can still enjoy them as much they did.³¹ If the *fables* can teach us a lesson, it is simply

(Bloomington, Ind. 1972) 7-18. Maria Teresa Marcialis, *Fontenelle, un filosofo mondano* (Sassari 1978) 145-59. Hazard, *The European Mind* cit. 51, 162-67.

²⁸ Fontenelle, *De l'Origine des fables* cit. 11, 37.

²⁹ Fontenelle, *De l'Origine des fables* cit. 16, 20, 22.

³⁰ Fontenelle, *De l'Origine des fables* cit. 30f.

³¹ Fontenelle, *De l'Origine des fables* cit. 35: “*Quoique nous soyons incomparablement plus éclairés que ceux dont l'esprit grossier inventa de bonne foi les fables, nous reprenons très aisément ce même tour d'esprit qui rendit les fables si agréables pour eux; ils s'en repaissaient, parce qu'ils y ajoutaient foi; et nous nous en repaissons avec autant de plaisir sans les croire.*”

that they are the earliest form of history. Whereas we can read them the same way we read modern tales of fiction, the Greeks had to take their *fables* for history, for they had no other. “*Ne cherchons donc autre chose dans les fables que l’histoire des erreurs de l’esprit humain.*”³² They are historical documents in that they can teach us how primitive and barbaric the minds were that conceived them. Beyond that, Fontenelle would not probe; already Thucydides had been able to draw more historical insight from the ancient myths. The shallowness of Fontenelle’s conclusions is exposed by a comparison with Giambattista Vico’s *Scienza nuova*, which was published the year after Fontenelle’s essay had appeared in print.

To do Fontenelle justice, one should also compare his slim essay with the *Mythologie* of the abbé Antoine Banier (1673-1741), published in three solid volumes.³³ Banier was a valued member of the Paris Académie des Inscriptions and the recognized authority on myth among the academicians.³⁴ His purpose was to wring historical facts from the ancient tales by means of such time-proven devices as Euhemerism. That he rejected allegorical interpretations was the measure of his enlightenment. He argued that the ancients themselves had used their myths as a source of historical instruction. He was not referring to Thucydides, however, but to Alexander the Great, who would not have envied Ulysses for having his deeds sung by Homer, if he had thought that Homer’s tales were nothing but fibs.³⁵ As if immortal fame needed to be based on historical facts.

As we turn to Heyne, we enter a different world. Göttingen, where he taught, was unburdened with conservative tradition and, under the influence of English empiricism, open to new approaches. Its school of historical studies excelled. Heyne’s contributions to mature

³² Fontenelle, *De l’Origine des fables* cit. 11, 39.

³³ Antoine Banier, *Explication historique des fables où l’on découvre leur origine et leur conformité avec l’histoire ancienne* (Paris 1711). I was using a second edition (Paris 1715), rewritten and increased by a third volume. The work was reprinted as late as 1785. Another revision of Banier’s work is *La Mythologie et les fables expliquées par l’histoire*, 3 vols. (Paris 1738-40). See Feldman and Richardson, *The Rise of Modern Mythology* cit. 86-92.

³⁴ See e.g. *Histoire de l’Académie royale des Inscriptions* cit. XII, 1734-37 (Paris 1740) 9-19. Several parts of Banier’s opus magnum were first published among the *Mémoires* of the Academy.

³⁵ Banier, *Explication historique des fables* (1715) cit. I 6.

historicism had a broad range.³⁶ While something of his purpose may have been revealed by what he found lacking in Winckelmann's work, we are now concerned with a single, but central, aspect: his concept of myth. It was a subject that he found necessary to expound again and again, over four decades, in his lectures, academic addresses and critical editions of classical texts. This was the tenet that he was driving home on every occasion: myths are the key — the only key we possess, and therefore vital — to an understanding of mankind in its childhood, to an insight into the opaque world of archaic and primitive societies.³⁷ Nobody had yet seen this capital point the way Heyne did, and nobody succeeded so well in making others accept it and ponder its vast implications. Of course he had learned from the work of others; he acknowledged his debt to Lowth. That he knew Vico's *Scienza nuova* is apparently improbable, but Hume, Charles de Brosses and even Fontenelle were less likely to be overlooked by such a thorough scholar, who was also the University's librarian.³⁸ Above all, however, his ideas on myth developed over the preparation of his lectures and his thoroughly commented editions of Virgil (1767) and Homer (1802). Perhaps it was to be expected that the modern theory of myth should largely grow out of the analysis of two poets whose works gave rise to the tradition of the origins of Rome. Heyne himself looked for parallels between the archaic customs of the ancient world and the behaviour of primitive tribes in his own time. Moreover, he realized, and stated with due modesty, that the great success of the novel theory of myth among Old Testament scholars was due to him, a classicist.³⁹ He insisted that a solid knowledge of classical mythology was indispensable for literary scholars and antiquarians alike. To promote it, he edited the *Bibliotheca* of Pseudo-Apollodorus,

³⁶ Ulrich Muhlack, "Historie und Philologie" in *Aufklärung und Geschichte. Studien zur deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft im 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. H.E. Bödeker et al. (Göttingen 1986) 49-81, esp. 58-66.

³⁷ For the following see Hartlich and Sachs, *Der Ursprung des Mythosbegriffes* cit. 11-19; Axel E.-A. Horstmann, "Mythologie und Altertumswissenschaft. Der Mythosbegriff bei Christian Gottlob Heyne" *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 16 (1972) 60-85. Grafton, *Defenders of the Text* cit. 217-19. Dieter Schrey, *Mythos und Geschichte bei Johann Arnold Kanne und in der romantischen Mythologie* (Tübingen 1969) 31-41.

³⁸ Horstmann, "Mythologie und Altertumswissenschaft" cit. 63, 80-84. David Hume, *The Natural History of Religion in Four Dissertations* (London 1757). Charles de Brosses, *Du Culte des dieux féüches ou parallèle de l'ancienne religion de l'Egypte avec la religion actuelle de Nigritie* ([Geneva] 1760).

³⁹ [Pseudo-]Apollodorus Atheniensis, *Bibliotheca*, ed. C.G. Heyne, second ed. (Göttingen 1803) I iii (first published in 1782-83).

an unsystematic manual of Greek mythology, now thought to have been compiled around the first century A.D. With its extensive commentary and critical notes, Heyne's edition provided the impulse to make Apollodorus yet more widely accessible through a German translation.⁴⁰ Heyne also encouraged a former student, Martin Gottfried Herrmann, to write a properly organized *Handbuch der Mythologie aus Homer und Hesiod* (Berlin 1787-95).

Heyne's analysis of the mythical mentality presumes "humans as yet unpolished and barely emerged from the life-style of savages." They lack the ability to place single observations in a wider context and to think in terms of cause and effect. On the other hand, the simple phenomena, which they perceive, cause them emotions of the most intense kind.⁴¹ Lacking abstract notions, they rely on concrete experiences, such as procreation, birth, warfare and death, to give expression to other vicissitudes that they observe. They invent gods to express the elementary forces of nature and of human emotion. To the modern reader, the language of the mythical age (*sermo mythicus*) is replete with symbols and allegories. The archaic bards, finally, render symbolically or allegorically expressed phenomena as historical facts.⁴² Homer, who lived at the threshold of literacy, modifies mythical language to express the proto-metaphorical thoughts of times even more archaic than his own. He presents ideas as concrete facts. By telling stories he creates "history." What Homer creates is history, not myth. Myth is what he found when he set to work; it is the material with which he is working. In what sense Heyne understood Homer to produce history we shall examine later in the specific case

⁴⁰ See the preface of the German translation of Pseudo-Apollodorus by Johann Franz Beyer (Hadamar and Herborn 1802).

⁴¹ Christian Gottlob Heyne, inaugural address "De caussis fabularum seu mythorum veterum physicis" (1764), published with addenda in his *Opuscula academica collecta* I (Göttingen 1785) 184-206, esp. 190f.: "*In hominibus itaque rudibus et modo a silvestri vita progressis vix cogitatio ullius rei esse potest nisi quae sub sensus cadat; feriuntur autem et impelluntur sensus multo gravius, si animi multarum rerum contemplatione avvocati et districti non sint, sed in unam rem oculis propositam intenti.*" For the following see also Hartlich and Sachs, *Der Ursprung des Mythosbegriffes* cit. 15-19, and Horstmann, "Mythologie und Altertumswissenschaft" cit. 72-77. Both works are quoting in part from writings by Heyne that I have not seen.

⁴² [Pseudo-]Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, ed. Heyne cit. I xvii: "*Verum usus longe maximus fabularum est... declarandum prisorum hominum sentiendi et sensa animi eloquendi ad sermonem symbolicum et a rebus sensui subiectis repetitum ...; quid quod magna fabularum poeticarum pars ex hoc enata est, quod vetus sermo symbolicus seu allegoricus in factum historicum fuit mutatus.*"

of Aeneas.⁴³ By the time Virgil prepares to rework the old mythical material, Homer's "unpolished" tales had been refined by intermediate writers. Virgil, finally, is to present some of them in a new and yet more ornate fashion to the sophisticated public of his times.

As modern students approached the mythical material enveloped in the ancient poems, they needed to remove the embellishments and identify the basic myths, such as the first bards had found them. To do this, a method of mythology was required. In proposing such a method, Heyne distinguished two basic categories of myth.⁴⁴ First, historical myths were based on actual facts and aimed to reduce complexity to singular action, as when the founding of a city was presented as the work of a single eponymous hero. Second, philosophical myths expressed in concrete fashion a philosopheme, which had no basis in fact. For instance, the idea of the universe emerging from chaos could be rendered as a struggle between gods representing the four elements. One may recall how, inspired by Heyne, Eichhorn and Gabler agonized over the question whether Eve's encounter with the snake was a historical or a philosophical myth.⁴⁵ Finally, we might point out that Heyne warned the students of myth explicitly to guard against the rationalist misconceptions so often entertained in the past. Myths were not just silly tales, void of all truth and wisdom and indicative merely of the appallingly primitive age that had produced them.⁴⁶ Fontenelle might come to mind here. Moreover, if the *sermo mythicus* was allegorical, it was not consciously so. What it related was meant to be factual, and any allegorical interpretation in the rational fashion of later ages was bound to miss the point. Euhemerism, for instance, should be applied with great restraint.⁴⁷ To insist so much on the irrationally factual character of myth was perhaps Heyne's greatest merit. Myths were not

⁴³ Virgilius Maro, ed. C.G. Heyne, fourth ed. by G.P.E. Wagner (Leipzig 1832-41) II 10-12, 39f. (the first of Heyne's disquisitions on the *Aeneid*). Cf. below p. ...

⁴⁴ Hartlich and Sachs, *Der Ursprung des Mythosbegriffes* cit. 18f. Horstmann, "Mythologie und Altertumswissenschaft" cit. 74f. Heyne sometimes postulated a third category of myth, which he termed poetical. By this he understood a bard's elaboration of historical or philosophical myths, or a newly invented tale, as long they were presented in the style of the mythical age. Similar categories had previously been proposed by Antoine Banier and Nicolas Fréret; see Feldman and Richardson, *The Rise of Modern Mythology* cit., 91, 97 and also below, Appendix II.

⁴⁵ See above p. 256f.

⁴⁶ [Pseudo-]Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* cit. I xvi. Heyne, *Opuscula academica* I cit. 216.

⁴⁷ Heyne, *Opuscula academica* I cit. 187. Horstmann, "Mythologie und Altertumswissenschaft" cit. 76f. Hartlich und Sachs, *Der Ursprung des Mythosbegriffes* cit. 13.

merely fiction, artfully crafted by poets; they lent concrete expression to the sensations and thoughts of an archaic age so obscure and deep that the modern mind could barely fathom it.

IV

The Debate on the Origins of Rome : the Sceptics

As pointed out earlier,⁴⁸ how Rome had come into existence was a matter of pervasive interest in Early Modern Europe. Classical scholars, in particular, felt almost obligated to address the question; it was a taxing test of their ability — rather like Rakhmaninov's Second Concerto today might be to young pianists. The more closely and critically they learned to read the ancient epics and histories, the tougher became the questions that needed to be answered. At the root of them there lay one simple fact: all the sources taken to be relevant, except Homer, were secondary and discouragingly late; or worse, they claimed to be old but turned out to be fakes. What information, if any, could be trusted? And what was one to make of the earlier sources that were adduced in the extant histories but now were irrevocably lost?

Erasmus may have been unprecedented in distinguishing soberly between historical figures and such characters in Homer and Virgil as he deemed to be fictional, but he never emphasized this distinction and it did not catch on.⁴⁹ Early seventeenth-century scholars like Claude Saumaise (1588-1653) and Gerardus Vossius (1577-1649), for all their critical acumen, as far as I can see, never doubted the historicity of Aeneas and Romulus.⁵⁰ Even the great Joseph Scaliger relied on astronomy to establish the precise date of Romulus' death, which

⁴⁸ See above p. 221f.

⁴⁹ See above pp. 154-56.

⁵⁰ A different opinion is expressed by Noémi Hepp in her *Homère en France au XVIIe siècle* (Paris 1968) 95, and in "Homère en France au XVIe siècle," *Atti, Accademia delle scienze di Torino, Classe di scienze morali* 96 (1961-62) 389-508, esp. 496-501. But the evidence that Hepp refers to does not, I think, support her case.

allegedly had occurred during a solar eclipse. But did the sources deserve credence? Scaliger himself raised the question.⁵¹

Jean Du Temps (Temporarius), of Blois, was an obscure lawyer. His *Chronologicae demonstrationes*, chronological tables of universal history with a number of pertinent comments, is in many ways an unexceptional work; Scaliger scoffed at it.⁵² It ends with 1580, and one might suppose that the author died shortly thereafter. His family is found in the Huguenot stronghold of La Rochelle, where two sons re-edited the *Chronologicae demonstrationes* in 1600. The first edition had been published four years earlier in Frankfurt. Du Temps stuck to the antediluvian giants, the Flood and the identification of Noah with various Greek gods and heroes.⁵³ But he grew unprecedentedly recalcitrant when he turned to the origins of Rome. His very reliance on biblical dates may have boosted his scepticism about the credibility of secular sources. The Trojan War and the foundation of Rome figured prominently among the early events for which no satisfactory dates could be supplied. Du Temps did not waste any comments on the Trojans, but with regard to Romulus he was blunt:

There can be little doubt that the prancing poets fabricated "Romulus" in analogy to "Rome," because they knew nothing about the origins of the city. For so it happens usually when the founders of cities remain hidden in obscurity. Thus to render Rome's beginnings awesome and lend credibility to the legend of its founder, they made him a the son of a god, born of a Vestal virgin, exposed as a baby and brought up by wild beasts, a fratricide, a rapist and a war-lord, in the end removed from anyone's sight, carried up to heaven and made a god.⁵⁴

To the doubts traditionally raised since Antiquity about Romulus' father, his she-wolf nurse and his ascension, Du Temps added a new

⁵¹ Scaliger, *De emendatione temporum* cit. 395f.

⁵² Erasmus, *The Origins of Rome* cit. 52-54, also for the following. Erasmus' book was the first to point out the significance of Du Temps in our context; see the review by Arnaldo Momigliano in his *Terzo contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico* (Rome 1966) II 769-74. The following references are to the second edition: Jean Du Temps, *Chronologicarum demonstrationum libri tres* (La Rochelle 1600). The tables end with 1580, but on eight otherwise blank pages the date line is continued to 1980 (!), evidently for the benefit of future readers who might like to enter important events. It might also be noted that this work offers B.C. dates along with Creation dates; cf. above pp. 272-74.

⁵³ Du Temps, *Chronologicae demonstrationes* cit. 10f., 23, 34-40.

⁵⁴ Du Temps, *Chronologicae demonstrationes* cit. 199.

one. Who were his wife and children; was it thinkable that Rome's first king never married? "These figments about Romulus — what person of sound mind will not count them among the old wives' tales?" Such is the yarn spun by the poets, and the slow-witted historians pick it up for lack of a better version. "Indeed, the oldest writers confirm that Rome was founded many centuries before the name of Romulus was invented and fabricated."⁵⁵

To Du Temps Romulus' tale was, according to the definitions used in this study, a legend; its mythical features would not be discovered until much later. To strengthen his case, Du Temps undertook to explain how the story came to be concocted. In fact, he offered two lines of explanation, and notwithstanding his failure to harmonize them, both held great potential for the future. One started from Plutarch's claim (in *Romulus* 3.1) that the tale was first spread by the Greek historian Diocles of Peparethus. "Now why would Diocles, a Greek, know the beginnings of Rome better than a Roman?" The answer is left to the reader; it has to be that Diocles did not know better. He just presented a tissue of lies, no doubt because to do so lay in his interest. At this point the other line of explanation takes over. It argues that beginnings as vile as those of Rome — and here Du Temps unwittingly presumes that the tale for the most part is true — cry out for embellishment.

So God had called forth that pig sty of robbers as a retribution and punishment for the whole world. As it grew larger by dint of parricide, treachery and the plundering and killing of neighbours, it desired to implicate the gods for having caused its beginnings.

The motives of the Greek Diocles, who wished to embarrass Rome, and those of her earliest inhabitants, who wished to exculpate themselves, cannot be reconciled. The inconsequence of this presentation is stressed, when Du Temps adds that Diocles' lies were picked up by the earliest Roman historians, Fabius Pictor and Lucius Cincius, who were both writing in Greek.⁵⁶

Du Temps volunteered his comments in the course of a chronological survey. To explain why no meaningful chronology of the origins of Rome was possible lay clearly within his scope. But to go beyond that did not. In the absence of datable events, quite

⁵⁵ Du Temps, *Chronologicae demonstrationes* cit. 200, 204.

⁵⁶ Du Temps, *Chronologicae demonstrationes* cit. 199f.; cf 67.

properly he did not venture an opinion as to how Rome really came into existence. In any event, what is significant is that from the very beginning of the Early Modern period there existed, as had never done in the Renaissance, a clear alternative to the matter-of-course acceptance of the traditional account. And if in Du Temps' case it is doubtful that his findings received the attention they deserved, the conclusions of Philip Cluverius were widely noted.⁵⁷

Given the shortness of his life, Philip Cluverius, or Clüver (1580-1622) would be sufficiently remarkable for his scholarly output alone; all of his career, however, is unusual. Born into a patrician family of Gdańsk, he went to Leiden and combined light-hearted pursuits with serious and intensive study under the guidance of no lesser a master than Joseph Scaliger. Leiden is where he would eventually settle down as the University's geographer-in-residence and write his imposing works. Before it came to that, however, he enlisted as a soldier in Bohemia, fought in Hungary, was jailed for anti-Habsburg pamphleteering and married an Englishwoman without prospects. His father had disowned him, but his mother helped finance his extensive travels through Europe as far as Sicily, which netted important insights for his works on ancient and modern geography. The *Germania antiqua* appeared in 1616 and the *Sicilia antiqua* three years later. They were followed posthumously, in 1624, by the *Italia antiqua*, his most important opus, and the *Introductio in universam geographiam*, his most popular one. They all exhibit stupendous erudition and considerable originality; moreover, all were beautifully produced by the Elzevier press.

It was in the *Italia antiqua* that Cluverius examined the traditional account of the origins of Rome. His conclusions were devastating.

No Aeneas ever came to Italy from a vanquished Troy. No Romulus and Remus (or Romus), grandsons of Numitor, ever existed, nor did their mother, Ilia or Rhea Silvia.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Erasmus, *The Origins of Rome* cit. 54. Erasmus shows that Du Temps' work was known to Giulio Minutoli and later to Albert Henri de Sallengre and to Beaufort; whether Cluverius had read it is not clear. Erasmus also discusses various instances of Cluverius' own influence; see the index of his book.

⁵⁸ Philippus Cluverius, *Italia antiqua*, ed. Daniel Heinsius (Leiden 1624) 3.2, p.843; cf. Erasmus, *The Origins of Rome* cit. 62f.

Other mythical settlers fared no better. There was no room in Cluverius' Italy for Kittim (Cethin), grandson of Japheth,⁵⁹ nor for the offspring of Ulysses with either Calypso or Circe.⁶⁰ Romulus' story, however, was particularly implausible. In addition to the points already questioned in Antiquity, Cluverius found "innumerable" fallacies in it. When Alba Longa was situated on a deep lake, why should the twins be taken to the distant river Tiber to be drowned there? And why would Romulus call his city "Roma" rather than "Romula," thus risking to glorify his undeserving brother Remus or Romus?⁶¹ In Romulus' case Cluverius was satisfied to demonstrate at length the utter lack of probability of the tale, but with Aeneas he went further and accomplished a remarkable first step towards recognizing the presence of myth in the modern sense. The whole pattern of Aeneas' wanderings hither and thither and also many details were borrowed from Homer's *Odyssey* and from the tale of Evander and the Pelasgians, as it appeared in Dionysius of Halicarnassus, among others. Cluverius kept his most sweeping verdict for last: "The Latin or Roman kings, all the way from Evander down to the consuls, were given false descents, false names and false records of their actions." He also offered an explanation for this wholesale fabrication of royal characters:

And there is nothing surprising about that since, as I have shown above, the Romans of later ages had no records (*monumenta*) of those oldest times. The Greeks, however, no less boldly than carelessly, as whim struck them, produced falsehoods in the place of truths — anything they might have dreamt up in their sleep. And it was from them that the Romans afterwards adapted their histories.⁶²

The crux of the matter, as Cluverius emphasized time and again, was the lack of sources. The Greeks were flagrantly irresponsible; unlike Du Temps, Cluverius never suggested that they wrote with a sinister intent. Diocles of Peparethus obtained very dubious information from inscriptions on Roman temples and conflated it with traditional Greek

⁵⁹ Cluverius, *Italia antiqua* cit. 1.6, pp. 37, 40. *Italia antiqua* 3.1, p. 791, and Cluverius' *Introductionis in universam geographiam tam veterem quam novam libri VI* (Leiden 1624), book I ch. 14, show that Cluverius, although unwilling to waste much time on the descendants of Noah, did not go as far as rejecting the Deluge and the Tower of Babel.

⁶⁰ Cluverius, *Italia antiqua* cit. 1.1, pp. 4, 7.

⁶¹ Cluverius, *Italia antiqua* cit. 3.2, pp. 829f.

⁶² Cluverius, *Italia antiqua* cit. 3.2, p.855; cf. Erasmus, *The Origins of Rome* cit. 61f.

tales. Fabius Pictor and other Roman historians were forced to turn to the Greeks, because no other sources of early Roman history were available. Cluverius drew attention to Livy 6.1.1-3, where two reasons, in particular, are stated. First, writing was little used in those early days, and without writing there were no reliable records. Secondly, such records as had, nevertheless, once existed, "nearly all" perished in 386 B.C., when the Gauls set fire to the city. "To say it frankly," Cluverius concluded, "Livy himself took for mere legends (*fabulosa sibi videtur*) what he was going to write about the beginnings and the founders of Rome."⁶³

Here we have reached the turning point in Cluverius' examination of the origins of Rome. He rejected the available information about the founders and the kings as unreliable. As well he might; he was writing a work of geography, not a history, so historical events were ultimately irrelevant to his purpose. He needed geographical data, though; and to obtain these he could do no better than turn to these same sources whose untrustworthiness he had just exposed. His view of the settlement of central Italy would not concern us, if he had stuck to his guns and managed without legendary founders and kings. But this he was not able to do, at least not completely. He believed that Latium was originally called Sicilia, because the first inhabitants were the Siculi. One of their kings, Italus by name, renamed the region Italia. Later the Siculi were driven away to Sicily when some tribes of Aborigines and Pelasgians arrived from Greece. Jointly these new settlers were called Latini. The Pelasgians were led by Evander, who was also called Pelasgus.⁶⁴ So Cluverius' readers must conclude that Evander, despite all the falsehoods reported of him and his successors, was real. In fact, the real Evander offered the model from which the tale of the fictitious Aeneas was to be fashioned.⁶⁵ On this specific point then Cluverius was inconsistent. The remarkable thing, however, is that he did form a coherent theory of the settlement of Latium, albeit one that has long since been abandoned. Unlike Du Temps, he achieved a positive reconstruction of the prehistory of Rome. He did away with the traditions of Aeneas and Romulus, and although his own theory was also based on dubious sources and hardly closer to the

⁶³ Cluverius, *Italia antiqua* cit. 3.2, pp. 826, 828f., cf. 855, referring to Livy, 1 Preface 6-8 and 5.21.9. Cf above p. 47f.

⁶⁴ Cluverius, *Italia antiqua* cit. 3.1.3, pp. 790, 808, 879; cf. Erasmus, *The Origins of Rome* cit. 61, 106f.

⁶⁵ See above p. 291f.

facts, his approach could point the way to sounder investigations of Greek and Etruscan migrations and settlements.

Cluverius liked strong language and readily used terms like “fabulous” and “absurd.” We shall see that in the seventeenth century his departure from tradition seemed more radical than it does today. He certainly got the stone rolling. In subsequent debates on the origins of Rome, Samuel Bochart is often mentioned in one breath together with Cluverius. The reason is Bochart’s *Dissertation sur la question si Enée a jamais esté en Italie*, published first in 1668 and thereafter as an appendix to French translations of Virgil’s *Aeneid*. It was perhaps more widely noted in a Latin version that was printed as a small monograph in 1672 and reappeared later in editions of Bochart’s collected works.⁶⁶ The analogy between Cluverius and Bochart is limited, however. Neither in his dissertation nor in the *Geographia sacra* did Bochart cast any doubt on the existence of a historical Aeneas. His concern, as usual, was with oriental languages; in the debate about the origins of Rome he was an outsider. In the *Geographia sacra* he collected impressive proofs for the lack of affinity between the Etruscan and Phoenician languages and, accordingly, the two nations. The Etruscans, who were also called Tyrrhenians, had nothing whatever to do with the Phoenician city of Tyrus. Also, it was nonsense to trace the Roman cult of Anna Perenna back to Anna, sister of the Phoenician queen Dido, who after Dido’s suicide was said to have followed Aeneas to Latium.⁶⁷

Here then was the starting point for Bochart’s subsequent dissertation, in which he argued that Aeneas himself never reached Latium. In the *Iliad*, 20.307f., Homer reports a prophecy that Aeneas and his offspring would rule over the Trojans. Bochart rejected the various attempts that had been made to reconcile this passage with Virgil’s account of how Aeneas fled from burning Troy, never to return, and eventually died in Latium. Rather, Aeneas must have been

⁶⁶ The dissertation is in form of a letter addressed to Jean Regnault de Segrais, author of a verse translation of the *Aeneid*. The Latin version (Hamburg 1672) is by Johann Scheffer. The following references are to the Collected Works of 1692: Samuel Bochart, *Geographia sacra ... Cui accedunt variae dissertationes ... Editio tertia*, ed. Pierre de Villemandy (Leiden 1692) 1150-77.

⁶⁷ Bochart, *Geographia sacra* (1692) cit. 582.

king somewhere in the region of Troy.⁶⁸ This assumption, Bochart found, was confirmed by the etymology of various place names. By contrast, the Phrygian language, which according to Bochart was spoken by Aeneas and his Trojans, had left no traces in the Latin of later times. Nor could it be argued that the religion of Aeneas and Troy had been carried to Rome. Since it was believed that Aeneas' mother had been Venus, what should be made of the fact that "Rome heard nothing of Venus until 550 years after the city's foundation?"⁶⁹ Surely, Virgil must have been wrong in claiming that Aeneas had settled in Latium. Virgil could be exonerated, though; scores of Greek and Roman writers before him had all placed the Trojan king in Rome's prehistory. For Virgil to oppose that consensus of opinion would have been folly. He was poet, not a historian; why should he stick out his neck for factual correctness in a matter like Aeneas' movements, and lose his best yarn? One senses that to the pious pastor of Caen the very existence of Aeneas, and likewise of Anna, Dido, Ulysses and their likes, was adiaphorous. He never denied their historicity. Their tales were harmless nonsense, as was the Trojan genealogy of the Franks, which continued to delight so many of Bochart's compatriots.

If the historicity of Virgil's heroes could be left undecided, the presence of the Trojans in Latium was different. Here was a legend that touched upon the central core of Bochart's scholarly theories, and he did not spare any of his wide learning to lay it to rest, even though this meant pulling a corner-stone from the edifice of the Rome tradition, dear to so many hearts. A few years before Bochart's dissertation was first published, Charles de Saint-Evremond (1612-1703) had gone even further and treated all of Rome's beginnings as a negligible issue. He must have understood that his view was flying in the face of the classicist circles obsessed with this very subject. He argued that Rome would have deserved better application on the part of its historians than inventing divine parents for Aeneas and Romulus. But, in a way, it was not surprising that legends abounded in early Roman history, for prior to the republican period nothing worthwhile had been accomplished. So there were seven kings — what had they done? After more than two hundred years Rome still was a

⁶⁸ In this context Bochart drew attention to Strabo (13.1.52f.), who understood Homer to have meant that Aeneas was king in Troy. He also examined the disagreements between other accounts of Aeneas' fortunes.

⁶⁹ Bochart, *Geographia sacra* (1692) cit. 1157; cf. 1151-66.

miserable city-state. "Today a single battle won on narrow ground would net vaster conquests."⁷⁰

The intriguing disagreements in the Greek accounts of the fate of Troy, which had sparked Bochart's critique, also raised questions about another segment of the Trojan tradition. Christoph Adam Rupertus (1612-47), of Altdorf in Bavaria, taught in the recently founded university of his native city. His tack was to deny that the Greeks had defeated the Trojans, destroyed their city and killed King Priam. On the other hand, he accepted Aeneas' voyage to Italy and his genealogical links to Romulus and the subsequent kings of Rome.⁷¹ Rupertus' book was published after his early death. It took the unappealing form of an extensive commentary on a brief and insignificant piece of writing. But the principal reason why it was rarely mentioned in subsequent discussions⁷² was no doubt that his arguments, presented in impulsive and undisciplined fashion, failed to carry conviction. He recognized Dares, Dictys and Annius of Viterbo as the fakes they were and generally had a sensible grasp of ancient and modern writers. But his own theory was based on mysterious information derived from Egyptian monuments that he failed to identify.⁷³

The advance of critical attitudes to the turn of the eighteenth century can be gathered from the Halle *Observationes selectae*, a semi-annual review started in 1700, whose purpose was to give broad exposure to the ideas of the early Enlightenment. The instigator and principal editor was Christian Thomasius (1655-1728), and contributions usually took the form of bibliographical essays, discussing recent or rare books on a certain topic. The third volume of the *Observationes selectae* offers three anonymous contributions that must claim our attention. They examine "The Legend of the

⁷⁰ Charles Marguetel de Saint-Denis, seigneur de Saint-Evremond, *Réflexions sur les divers génies du peuple romain dans les divers temps de la République* (written in 1663/64) in *Oeuvres en prose*, ed. René Ternois (Paris 1962-69) II 220-365, here 221-23. Cf. Hazard, *The European Mind* cit. 123-28 and passim.

⁷¹ Christoph Adam Rupertus, *Observationes ad historiae universalis synopsis Besoldianam minorem* (Nuremberg 1659), esp. 64-100, 267-70, also for the following. The editor, Christoph Arnold, states in his preface that this was Rupertus' last work, composed in 1645-46.

⁷² Jacobus Perizonius, in his *Dissertationes septem* (Leiden 1690) 119, calls Rupertus "diligentissimus."

⁷³ Like other authors in the ongoing debate, Rupertus probably used passages from Dio Cassius (or Dio Cocceianus or Dio Chrysostomus) of Prusa, a first-century A.D. rhetorician, especially his 11th Discourse, 38, 123.

Destruction of Troy and the Views of Authors dealing with it down to Homer," a continuation, reviewing the post-Homeric writers, and finally "The Origins of Rome and the Views of Writers dealing with that Topic."⁷⁴ Thomasius' anonymous contributor binds his three essays together by stating that "among modern writers it is fairly generally believed that the key to the origins of Rome must be sought in the ruins of Troy."⁷⁵ The two surveys of ancient and modern literature on Troy lead him to discomfiting conclusions. "Where not to look for the origins of the Romans would be easier to say than where to look for them." Like Rupertus, he rejects Dares, Dictys and, generally, the idea of pre-Homeric sources. Theodorus Ryckius' attempt to construe a pre-Homeric consensus in support of the Trojan tradition is futile.⁷⁶ What is left is Homer, but poets may lie, and "Homer was a poor bard who sang at banquets for a living and had to please his audiences." Even so, amid much falsehood, there is likely also truth. The author suspends his final judgement. "I dare not deny it," he says about the Trojan War as such. "I dare not affirm it," he adds regarding the destruction of Troy, the wanderings of Ulysses and Aeneas' migration to Italy.⁷⁷ And as for the ruins of Troy, from which Rome supposedly had sprung — not a trace of them had remained by the time that Strabo visited the site, whereas normally ruins last for thousands of years. In short, "the issue of Troy's destruction must remain doubtful and legendary (*res ... incerta ... et fabulosa*)," and *incerta* here may qualify *fabulosa*, not reinforce it.⁷⁸ The third essay surveys ancient historical and modern antiquarian writing on Rome.⁷⁹ The author praises Ottaviano Ferrari⁸⁰ and

⁷⁴ [Christian Thomasius, Georg Ernst Stahl and Johann Franz Buddeus, editors], *Observationum selectarum ad rem litterariam spectantium tomus III* (Halle 1701) 1-73: "De excidii Troiani fabula et de eiusdem scriptoribus usque ad Homerum iudicium" — "De excidido Troiano et eius post Homerum iudicium" — "De origine Romana et scriptoribus de eadem iudicium."

⁷⁵ *Observationes selectae* cit. III 5.

⁷⁶ *Observationes selectae* cit. III 5f., 9-12, 32f., 55-57. For Ryckius see below p. 300f.

⁷⁷ *Observationes selectae* cit. III 20, 31, 51f., 54.

⁷⁸ *Observationes selectae* cit. III 57f.

⁷⁹ To near the end of the seventeenth century, the monopoly of the ancient historians had gone unchallenged. No modern author had produced a general history of either Greece or Rome: see Momigliano, "Ancient History and the Antiquarians" cit. 75-79.

⁸⁰ Ottaviano Ferrari (1518-86), in *De origine Romanorum* (printed in Graevius' *Thesaurus* cit. I 1-32), commented on the many contradictory views of Rome's beginnings that had come down from the ancient writers. He distinguished two foundations of Rome, the first by Romus, son of Aeneas, and the second by colonists from Alba under the leadership of Romulus and Remus; see Erasmus, *The Origins of Rome* cit. 48-52. A work that Thomasius' contributor could

Bochart; moreover he does not contradict Cluverius. He concludes that in the wake of various immigrants from Greece, some Phrygians or Trojans had come to Latium and that they might be linked to the prehistory of Rome. The stuff about Aeneas' flight following the destruction of Troy, however, came from heady banquet songs. By contrast, Romulus and Remus are real. The sons of Rhea Silvia, grown up among shepherds, became bandits and the founders of Roman power.

V

The Origins of Rome : Defenders of the Tradition

A stratum of scepticism with regard to the traditional account of Rome's beginnings was in evidence throughout the seventeenth century. The various elements were aptly summed up by Thomasius' anonymous contributor in 1701. Compared with Cluverius' taste for stark formulations, his language was tempered and his conclusions are hesitant. Over the course of the century the critical school had failed to significantly gain momentum, but its impact was sufficient to spread unease and nervousness among the conservative majority of scholars. A typical representative of that majority was Gerardus Vossius, professor of eloquence at Leiden and a prolific, highly successful writer. The year before Cluverius' *Italia antiqua* appeared, Vossius had published his *Ars historica* (1623). In a passage of that work he listed many famous historians of Antiquity, who could not always be trusted. To distinguish a truthful historian from a swindler is such a tricky business, Vossius laments. He quotes Livy 6.1.1-2⁸¹ and Diodorus Siculus 1.5.1. In light of their testimony we must accept that, before the Trojan War, everything in Greek history and, before

not include in his survey, since it was published concurrently with his own, was Henry Dodwell (1641-1711), *De veteribus Graecorum Romanorumque cyclis, obiterque de cyclo Judaeorum aetate Christi dissertationes decem* (Oxford 1701-2). In one of these dissertations Dodwell dealt with the beginnings of Rome. He dismissed the reigns of Aeneas and his successors in Latium as *fabulae* and even doubted the historicity of Romulus. On the other hand, although he noted the lack of reliable sources, he accepted the subsequent kings of Rome as basically historical (pp. 675-80); see Erasmus, *The Origins of Rome* cit. 91f. 109f.

⁸¹ Cf. above pp. 47f., 293.

the Sack of Rome by the Gauls, everything in Roman history is uncertain.⁸² Yet, despite such passages, Vossius was not about to rival the critical bent of Cluverius. His statements were not intended to cause alarm — neither to his readers nor to himself. In his huge work *De historicis latinis* (1627), he again quoted Livy 6.1.1-3., but here, as if he had wished to counter the sceptical conclusions that Cluverius had recently drawn from this passage, he emphasized that all was not lost. Even if almost all the public records had perished when the Gauls set Rome afire, the recording officials did not perish and afterwards should have been able to restore much of the losses from memory. Moreover, cities in the vicinity of Rome likely kept their own records, which were bound to cover much the same ground as the ones that had been destroyed in Rome. At any rate, ancient records had once existed, and they had been used by Greek historians like Diocles of Peparethus and Antiochus of Syracuse.⁸³ In general, the extant writers of later periods could be trusted to have used solid information. To prove this, Vossius drew up a catalogue of the lost sources of early Roman history, listing for each what could be gathered from preserved writings. In his *Historiae universalis epitome*, he confidently assigned precise dates to the kings of Troy and of Rome, also to Aeneas and Janus, an “*antiquissimus rex*” of the Latini, who had flourished in 2625 from the Creation.⁸⁴ That same Janus occupied Vossius in his *De gentili theologia* (1641), but here he was taken to have begun his public career as a Greek god, modelled after Javan, son of Japheth, if not indeed after Noah himself. The Romans acquired the cult of Janus from Greece. “Since they knew that in ancient times kings were placed among the hierarchy of the gods, they readily persuaded themselves that Janus had been an old king of Latium.”⁸⁵

The puzzlingly inconsistent treatment of Janus offers a fair indication of the strict limits that Vossius set to his questioning of the tradition. His example was followed by two of his successors in the Leiden chair of eloquence, both of them equipped with the learning,

⁸² Gerardus Johannes Vossius, *Ars historica* (Leiden 1623) 35, 49f. (chs. 6, 9). Cf. Erasmus, *The Origins of Rome* cit. 66f. and passim.

⁸³ Gerardus Johannes Vossius, *De historicis latinis libri III* 1.1. Like other works by Vossius, this was often reprinted. In the Leiden edition of 1651, the passage is pp. 3f. Cluverius is not mentioned at this point, but cf. p. 97.

⁸⁴ Gerardus Johannes Vossius, *Historiae universalis epitome*, written about 1622, but first published in his *Opera* (Amsterdam 1699) IV.

⁸⁵ Gerardus Johannes Vossius, *De theologia gentili* (Amsterdam 1641) I 137f. (Book 1.18).

the thoroughness and the prudence requisite for their position. The first was Theodorus Ryckius (1640-90). Not the least of his claims to distinction was the influence he exercised upon the second, the great Perizonius, who had been his student and remained a close friend.⁸⁶ In appointing himself a kind of guardian to the Roman tradition, Ryckius knew very well that the opponents he must vanquish were Bochart and, above all, Cluverius. And if Vossius had refrained from naming the latter as the target of his remonstrations, Ryckius gave no quarter. His references to Cluverius are unmistakable, as are those to Bochart. As was normal in his time, Ryckius looked for individual instigators when he developed his own theory of pre-Roman settlements. The first to lead immigrants into Italy was Auso, the chief of the Ausones. Contrary to what was often assumed, this Auso could not be a son of Ulysses with Calypso, nor with Circe, for Ulysses' travels following the Trojan War were undertaken several centuries after Auso's time. More likely he was a son of Atlas and Calypso.⁸⁷ After Auso to arrive were, among others, Janus, Evander, Hercules and Aeneas. Janus, who became king of the Aborigines, was certainly real. If he were not, how could one account for the cult that Latium instituted for him and for his deified father known as Saturn? As for the coming of Aeneas, Bochart's scepticism was mistaken. Maternal descent cannot be concealed; so for Aeneas to claim that Venus was his mother would have been absurd. Consequently he had no reason to initiate a Venus cult, although such a cult could be documented in Latium much earlier than Bochart had thought.⁸⁸ Turning to Romulus, there was no point in denying that many details of his tale were fictional, "but to infer from this that Rome was not founded by Romulus, or at least populated with new settlers, when all the Romans with one voice confirm that it so happened, seems too absurd to deserve a refutation."⁸⁹

In his longest chapter Ryckius marshalled all the evidence he could find in support of the tradition. He had classical literature at his fingertips and hoped to disarm his opponents by making an

⁸⁶ Erasmus, *The Origins of Rome* cit. 77-85 and passim, also for what follows here.

⁸⁷ Theodorus Ryckius, "Dissertatio de primis Italiae colonis et Aeneae adventu," first printed as an appendix to Ryckius' edition of Lucas Holstenius, *Notae et castigationes postumae in Stephani Byzantii Ethnika* (Leiden 1684). The following references are to a reprint in the Stephanus Byzantinus edition of Wilhelm Dindorf (Leipzig 1825) II Appendix 39-178, here 53f., 57 (ch. 2). Ryckius also compiles a chronological table, using Scaliger's Julian dating system.

⁸⁸ Ryckius, "Dissertatio" cit. 48f., 79-81, 167f. (chs. 5 and 12).

⁸⁹ Ryckius, "Dissertatio" cit. 154 (ch. 11).

appropriate selection. What he could not explain, though, is why his quotations and interpretations deserved more credit than theirs. He drew attention to Cicero's *Brutus* 19.75, a passage in which Cicero regretted the disappearance of the old ballads in praise of Roman heroes. According to Cato the Censor, such ballads used to be sung at banquets "many centuries before his time." This, Ryckius found, was proof that the valorous deeds of the earliest times had not been forgotten. As for Livy 6.1.1-3, the poet did not say that all records had perished. It could be assumed that some had survived on the Capitol, which the Gauls had never conquered.⁹⁰

The most impressive defender of the Romulus tradition was Jacobus Perizonius (1651-1715). In 1693 he succeeded Ryckius in the Leiden chair of eloquence; subsequently, in 1702, he became the first Dutch professor to teach the modern history of his country. Ever since Barthold Georg Niebuhr praised him in superlative terms, Perizonius' works, especially the *Animadversiones historicae* (1685), have been seen as a landmark in the progress of scholarship in the field of Roman history.⁹¹ Such recognition is deserved, but oddly enough it led to the mistaken assumption that Perizonius, a contemporary of the early Pyrrhonists, had been the first to do away with the legend of the foundation of Rome.⁹² Nothing could be farther from the truth. At an early stage of his career, in the *Animadversiones historicae*, Perizonius turned to Livy's famous statement (5.21.9) that in matters of remote antiquity, probability could be accepted as historical truth.⁹³ Perizonius adopted this maxim as a guiding principle; it is persistently applied in his *Dissertatio de historia Romuli et Romanae urbis origine* (1709).⁹⁴ Early on in this dissertation we find a fair and

⁹⁰ Ryckius, "Dissertatio" cit. 115 (ch. 10). For the debate on the banquet ballads, see Erasmus, *The Origins of Rome* cit. 80 and passim.

⁹¹ Barthold Georg Niebuhr, *Römische Geschichte*, preface, in the 3rd ed. (Berlin 1828) I viii. Schwegler, *Römische Geschichte* cit. I 135f. Momigliano, "Perizonius, Niebuhr and the Character of the Early Roman Tradition" reprinted in his *Secondo contributo alla storia* cit. 69-88, esp. 72-74.

⁹² Erasmus, *The Origins of Rome* cit. 75. Among the examples there quoted, Schwegler should be struck out. His judgment of Perizonius is correct in this regard too.

⁹³ Jacobus Perizonius, *Animadversiones historicae* ch. 5, reprint ed. (Altenburg 1771) 191.

⁹⁴ For the early printing this dissertation and for the influence of Ryckius on the work see Erasmus, *The Origins of Rome* cit. 76-82. The following references are to a reprint in Jacobus Perizonius, *Dissertationes septem* (Leiden 1740), actually the last of the seven pieces.

lucid summary of the positions of Bochart, Cluverius⁹⁵ and the anonymous contributor to Thomasius' *Observationes*. Although Perizonius registers his general disagreement with these critics of the tradition, he does not allow himself to be dragged into a debate on the exodus from Troy and the settlement of Latium. He was not going to involve himself with conjectures incapable of substantiation.⁹⁶ Interestingly, though, he makes an exception. He rejects the view that Troy was never destroyed by the Greeks, since it was supported only by negligible sources and opposed by a solid consensus of major classical authors.⁹⁷ Analogously he resolves that he can undertake a detailed defense of the Romulus tradition. It is favoured by an overwhelming consensus of ancient writers, whereas dissent is negligible. Once the tradition was cleansed of its unreasonable and fabulous traits, a residue of essential information remained that Perizonius found he could accept and restate in terms reminiscent of a creed.⁹⁸ Again he quotes Livy 5.21.9 and then turns to Cluverius:

To claim, emphatically and at length, that events long past and acknowledged only in the tradition of a single nation carry reliable truth and certainty would betray a lack of prudence and experience. But it is just as imprudent and foolhardy, I believe, to claim confidently that they are spurious, unless this can be proven by solid evidence, which [in this case] is difficult, I think.⁹⁹

The burden of proof is on Cluverius. He must show that the tradition is false; if he cannot, it must stand. In fact, it can be trusted for good reasons. To show this, Perizonius too offers a full discussion of the sources that the ancient historians would likely have had at their disposal. A novel argument, which he introduces, is based on a digest in the *Corpus iuris*.¹⁰⁰ He also adduces the banquet ballads, a topic he had treated more fully in the *Animadversiones historicae*, drawing

⁹⁵ Perizonius clearly recognizes Cluverius as his weightiest opponent; see his *Dissertationes septem* cit. 682f., 692ff.

⁹⁶ Perizonius here follows his general rules for sound scholarship; see above p. 275.

⁹⁷ Perizonius, *Dissertationes septem* cit. 683.

⁹⁸ Perizonius' summary resembles that of Thomasius' contributor, whom he is actually quoting: *Dissertationes septem* cit. 684-86; cf above pp. 296-98.

⁹⁹ Perizonius, *Dissertationes septem* cit. 686.

¹⁰⁰ Perizonius quoted from an unidentified copy of the *Corpus iuris*, where Digest 1.2.2 included a reference to the laws of Romulus and his successors having been collected at the time of King Tarquinius Superbus. Unfortunately the name of Tarquinius Superbus is a worthless substitution. See *Dissertationes septem* cit. 699f.; Erasmus, *The Origins of Rome* cit. 112-14.

attention to parallels in the Old Testament and also to Tacitus' reference to old Germanic songs in praise of Arminius.¹⁰¹ His argumentation was to prove momentous; in fact, he comes close to formulating a theory on the existence of oral records before writing became common.¹⁰²

In trying to ascertain fiction and fact in the Romulus tradition, Perizonius exhibited scholarly skills and a fairness that are remarkable by any standards. Beyond the specific problem of the origins of Rome, his defence of historical traditions in the face of Pyrrhonist hypercriticism retains validity. But just in the question that he had set out to answer, his criteria failed him. The reason is not difficult to see. Take, for example, the many disreputable actions reported of Romulus and his band. Improving on a point formerly made by Du Temps, Perizonius states that the tale "does nothing for the glory of the nation; on the contrary, it is liberally sprinkled with scandals."¹⁰³ Why should such a tradition have been accepted by the Roman historians, unless it were true? Perizonius' argument is fallacious, of course; but it made sense as long as the mechanics of mythmaking were not well understood. Myths and legends do not argue their case according to the rule-book of Cartesian logic. Herodotus and Livy had an intuitive rapport with their public that was beyond the rational grasp of Perizonius and his peers.

This is not to say that among the uncounted early modern participants in the debate on the origins of Rome all were well equipped with common sense or even of sound mind. One cannot help questioning the sanity of Jacobus Hugo (Hugues), an obscure canon from Lille, presumably residing in Rome. He maintained that Homer, Virgil and other classics had used veiled language to present crucial events in Judaeo-Christian history. When they spoke of the destruction of Troy and the following exodus, they really meant the fate that Jerusalem suffered from Nebuchadnezzar and Vespasian. They said "Romulus and Remus," but meant Peter and Paul and the foundation of the Roman church rather than that of the city. They said "Jason," "Theseus" and "Mars," but meant Jesus, the son of Mary, as

¹⁰¹ Cf. above p. 181.

¹⁰² Perizonius, *Dissertationes septem* cit. 695 and *Animadversiones historicae* cit. 209-12. Erasmus, *The Origins of Rome* cit. 80, 89-98, 116f., 130-32. Momigliano, *Secondo contributo alla storia* cit. 69-88.

¹⁰³ Perizonius, *Dissertationes septem* cit. 687: "... nihil ad gloriam gentis faciat, sed e contrario multis sit infamiae notis aspersa."

etymology must clearly show: Jesus — Iasius — Hesus — Theseus; Mariae filius — Mariaeus — Mavors — Mars.¹⁰⁴ Another pathological case was the learned Breton Jesuit Jean Hardouin (1646-1729). Like Hugo, he found in the *Aeneid* allegorical accounts of the destruction of Jerusalem and the coming of Christianity to Rome. Everything else in the poem was freely invented by its medieval author, who claimed that it was the work of Virgil. "*Virgilii numquam venit in mentem Aeneidem scribere.*"¹⁰⁵ Hardouin is probably the only writer of his generation who categorically denied the existence of Aeneas and his crew. To do so, at the turn to the eighteenth century required mental derangement. Poor Hardouin gradually came to see that nearly all the writings of the classics as well as those of St. Augustine and Dante were forged in the late Middle Ages.¹⁰⁶ It is more difficult to know what to think of the *Dissertatio de origine Romuli* (1684) by the highly reputed Dutch scholar Jacobus Gronovius (1645-1716). Arnaldo Momigliano wondered whether some of his arguments were offered tongue in cheek. Gronovius read his paper before a congenial audience gathered to celebrate the completion of his first five years as a professor in Leiden. He rejected most of the traditional tale as the spiteful fabrication of Diocles of Peparethus. Romulus, however, was historical, Gronovius maintained. He had immigrated to Latium from Syria, since Syria was the only place where his name could be found. In fact Gronovius could point to a Jewish namesake. He was Remaliah (or Romelias), the father of King Pekah of Israel (2 Kings 15.27). No less bizarre is the evidence that Gronovius marshalled in support of his thesis; he discussed religious

¹⁰⁴ Even recent history was reflected in the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*, or so Hugo believed. The Harpies were the Dutch Calvinists, and Luther was represented under the guise of Penelope's wicked suitors. See Jacobus Hugo, *Vera historia Romana seu origo Latii vel Italiae ac Romanae urbis ... Liber primus* (Rome 1655; no sequel was published) 147, 149, 196ff., 261, 263. In his imprimatur the Roman censor acknowledged Hugo's orthodoxy, but wisely added that responsibility for the historico-allegorical conjectures would have to rest with the author alone. Although often mentioned in modern literature as an absurdity, Hugo's book was largely ignored by his contemporaries. Thomasius' contributor cleverly used it to provide an effective contrast to his own reasonable and balanced summary of the origins of Rome; see *Observationes selectae* cit. III (1701) 66f.

¹⁰⁵ Jean Hardouin, "Pseudo-Virgilius. Observationes in Aeneidem" in *Opera varia* (Amsterdam 1733) 280-327, here 280. Cf. Erasmus, *The Origins of Rome* cit. 72f.; Momigliano, "Ancient History and the Antiquarian" cit. 89f.

¹⁰⁶ Jean Hardouin, *Chronologiae* (Paris 1693) 58 and passim.

and constitutional practices enacted by Romulus that betray an oriental origin.¹⁰⁷

VI

The Theory of Myth Applied to Rome

Looking back to the anonymous contributor to Thomasius' *Observationes* and to Perizonius, one may well conclude that by the first decade of the eighteenth century the debate on the traditions of Aeneas and Romulus had run its course. All that could be said, had been said. While radical arguments both for and against the tradition had failed to gain ground, the moderate critic of the *Observationes* and Perizonius, the moderate defender, saw eye to eye on a number of issues. But if the debate risked running out of new points to make, it was far from running out of steam. In the first half of the eighteenth century it shifted to a new centre and a new class of participants. The Paris Académie royale des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres was founded to create a debating floor for antiquarians of the most varied interests. Its members tended to be independent savants, and often abbés, rather than University professors of classics. The papers they read to each other were all in French rather than Latin. To produce critical editions of ancient literature was not a major concern here; the goal was to foster and nurture general culture, to represent and serve a broad public of educated gentlemen. This goal was achieved with the annual publication of the Academy's proceedings. These records bear witness to a persistent interest in the prehistory and history of Rome. This concern is evident from the formal inception of the Academy in 1701 and continued beyond the outbreak of the French Revolution and the absorption of the illustrious body into the new Institut de France. A number of relevant dissertations are discussed below in Appendix II. They may be of interest in that they have received scant attention in the twentieth century. But, on the whole, they fail to break new

¹⁰⁷ Jacobus Gronovius, *Dissertatio de origine Romuli recitata die XXIII Octobris quum alterum stationis suae quinquennium commendaret* (Leiden 1684), 10f., 30-32, 41f. Cf. Erasmus, *The Origins of Rome* cit. 102-5; Momigliano, *Terzo contributo alla storia degli studi classici* cit. II 770.

ground. Pyrrhonism was abhorred by most Academicians; yet it has left its mark everywhere in their debates. We have earlier looked at Louis de Beaufort's *Dissertation sur les cinq premiers siècles de l'histoire romaine* (1738).¹⁰⁸ Not that Beaufort, a Calvinist exile in Holland, would ever have been considered for membership in the Academy, but he epitomized the debate that was raging in France as elsewhere and made "*incertitude*" the standard verdict on the history of early Rome. After Beaufort, any affirmative departure from "*l'incertitude*" required explicit justification. In particular, Pyrrhonism helped sponsor one development in the Academy's debates that strikes one as being new. Hesitantly at first, the idea was advanced that consensus among the ancient writers was no proof of historicity. In opposition to Perizonius and his school of thought, it was pointed out that unhistorical traditions might prove no less vigorous and popular than factual ones, and possibly more so. This thought did not, however, lead to a fuller understanding of the nature of myth. The writings of Heyne left no discernable impact in the proceedings of the Académie des Inscriptions.

Heyne's theory of a prehistorical "childhood" age of myth has been discussed earlier.¹⁰⁹ Here we must examine how he applied that theory to Aeneas, Romulus and their peers in the myths of Rome's origins. Nowhere did he have a better opportunity to do so than in the preface, notes and excursuses accompanying his great edition of Virgil's *Aeneid*. The poem's basic plot, he emphasized in his preface, was mythical. It was not invented by Virgil, but rather the authentic record of remote times long before the invention of writing. Oral transmission through the centuries invariably produced a variety of versions. But Cluverius and Bochart were quite mistaken when they used discrepancies in the tradition as evidence that Aeneas had never gone to Italy. Variety did not preclude a substance that may be trusted.

Always there remains a certain core that is no more devoid of its original truth than is the tradition handed down by the most authoritative writers. And I wonder whether there are not some ancient myths that record more authentic facts than does much of both

¹⁰⁸ See above p. 278.

¹⁰⁹ See above pp. 285-88.

ancient and modern history, such as it has been presented by reliable historians with fulsome and elegant eloquence.¹¹⁰

When literature is born, the old core of mythical truth is seized upon by the earliest writers, who are all poets, and transformed into an account that claims to be factual. In his excursus on Circe, Heyne explained:

Homer transformed that ancient myth (*fabula*) ... into a factual account that in this form was experienced as true, and transferred its action to the companions of Ulysses. And thus the old myth (*mythus*) became a historical narrative.¹¹¹

The original myth of Circe, daughter of the sun-god, was formed in an age when the Greeks had as yet no geographical experience of the wider world. Then, seafaring began and the Greek poets adjusted the tale to higher levels of knowledge, creating different versions, which reflected the new horizons that were gradually opening up. Virgil naturally chose a version of the myth that located Circe's island on the shores of Latium.

In the case of Aeneas, Heyne attempted to establish the original core of the myth and its subsequent evolution. An echo of the primeval myth can be found in two lines of the *Iliad* (20.307f.). They state quite simply, in form of a prophecy, that Aeneas and his progeny will rule over the Trojans. Heyne notes that, again, no geographical location is indicated. Another part of the original core relates that Aeneas set out from burning Troy, taking with him his penates, his old father and his young son. Though not reported by Homer, this episode is confirmed by an overwhelming agreement among other writers. Later on, many places were suggested as stations of Aeneas' itinerary. The version that had him come to Latium was quite an old one, Heyne thought. Again it was the one that Virgil would obviously choose.¹¹² So myth becomes history, and if in Circe's case, as well as in that of Romulus, Heyne clearly ruled out that they ever existed in the flesh, Aeneas was apparently different. Although he started out

¹¹⁰ Virgil, ed Heyne cit. (2nd disquisition), II 37-56, here 41: "*Manet enim semper fundus aliquis non magis a veritate sua destitutus quam quae ab auctoribus gravissimis traduntur; et nescio an sini fabulae veterum, quibus plus verae rerum fidei insit quam multis historicorum fide copiose, diserte et ornate expositis sive in antiqua sive in recente historia.*"

¹¹¹ Virgil, ed. Heyne cit. III 125-30, here 129.

¹¹² Virgil, ed. Heyne cit. II 39-42.

as a myth, in the end seems that his coming to Italy was acceptable to Heyne as a historical fact. He states unequivocally that Cluverius and Bochart were wrong to deny it. Why, on the contrary, it should be affirmed is explained with an argument that has a familiar ring. To settle the question of Aeneas' move to Italy, Heyne argues, one has to reconstruct what was handed down orally from generation to generation in times before written records existed. If the reconstructed tale is supported by a uniform tradition, it becomes probable enough to be trusted. Now, if this means applying the rule of consensus as it was used by Perizonius and so many others, the result, nevertheless, is different. What Heyne meant to capture with this procedure is not history in the modern sense; it is *historia mythica*, the only history available for remote Antiquity.¹¹³

Heyne here seems to be groping for a notion of truth that would be germane to myth and essentially different from the truth germane to factual history. Such a notion of mythical truth, however, eluded him,¹¹⁴ as it would elude his pupil, friend and rival, Friedrich August Wolf (1759-1824).¹¹⁵ This elusive reality of Aeneas in the

¹¹³ Virgil, ed. Heyne cit. II 41f.: "*Nec enim aliter quam ut eam famam certam ac constantem obtinuisse doceas, quaestio illa de Italia ab Aenea adita expediri et firmari potest; est tamen talis fama in omni remotiore antiquitate usque ad ea tempora, quibus res scripto consignare coeptum est, pro fide et probabili ratione, in qua acquiescere et quam sequi necesse est; nec fuit aut est antiquissimorum temporum ulla alia historia quam mythica.*"

¹¹⁴ See e.g. Heyne's "De origine et caussis fabularum Homericarum commentatio" in the *Novi Commentarii* of the Göttingen Royal Society, 8 (1777) Historical and philosophical part, 34-58, esp. 52f. In this analysis of the oldest mythical material upon which Homer went to work, Heyne clearly retains the basic historicity of leaders like Agamemnon and Ajax. But the division line between fact and fiction is blurred. The plague that strikes the Greek army before Troy presumably was real. To the pristine mythical mind it was caused by the arrows shot by the god Apollo. Homer, "by way of accommodation," invents an explanation for Apollo's fury that permits coalescence with other accounts of historical events of the Trojan War. Homer explains that Apollo acted to revenge his priest Chryses, who had been slighted by Agamemnon; cf. *Iliad* 1.

¹¹⁵ In his celebrated *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (1795), Wolf ignored the new theory of myth to a point that may well convey silent disapproval of Heyne's and Eichhorn's ideas. The historicity of Homeric heroes is treated only in passing and with customary ambiguity: "But in fact it may also be doubted whether Homer attached the same value to the character of Achilles as do most professors of the art of poetry. For considering that he did not invent that sequence of great events, but received it by report [*non finxerit, sed fama acceperit*], (note 87) these things hardly seem to be lacking in verisimilitude. [Here follows a list of events in Achilles' 'biography']. Or do you think it odd, and the result not of nature but of art, that among the many myths [*mythis*] concerning that war there was one which could produce by its continuous narration a poem which would be harmonious and complete in its parts?"

Note 87 reads: "For neither does the poetry of those times tell everything truthfully or on the basis of a corrupted truth, nor does it invent everything, as scholars once thought. But those

mythical age could be illustrated with many of Heyne's notes. One example may suffice: In connection with Aeneas, Virgil used the name of a certain place, although Strabo showed that this name resulted from an event well after Aeneas' time. It follows, says Heyne, that Virgil uses an anachronism. In fact, his use of anachronisms is excused by necessity "whenever the narrative dwells upon those times which used as yet no place names."¹¹⁶ There was a time of Aeneas, a time before the said historical event that brought about the place name, a time, real enough to cause Virgil to commit an anachronism. In that mythical time Aeneas was evidently real in the sense of mythical reality.

It may finally be noted that Heyne credited Virgil himself with a certain understanding of the way in which myths work. In an excursus on the Trojan Horse Heyne pointed out how Homer and, after him, Virgil were handling this myth, whose ancient core was childish and rather absurd. Homer ingeniously links it to the general plot by having Helen understand the fatal secret hidden in the horse's belly (*Odyssey* 4.274-89). On the other hand, Homer completely fails to explain why the Trojans ignore Helen's warnings. It is left to Virgil to bestow plausibility and inner coherence to Homer's tale. To this end he introduces the episodes of Sinon and, especially, Laocoon. The goddess Athene herself destroys Laocoon to make sure that his premonitions will go unheeded. Thus Virgil shows that he understood what a powerful hold religion must have had on people's mind in the mythical age of the Trojan War.¹¹⁷

It remained for Barthold Georg Niebuhr (1776-1831) to complete the process that Heyne had initiated. Heyne applied the theory of myth to his critical reading of classical texts, the field that had inspired it in the first place. Niebuhr applied it to his writing of Roman history. In unforgettable language he evoked the picture of mythical age, separated from our own historical one by deluges, but visible still in the "cyclopic" walls of the Etruscan cities of Latium and thus

who wish to separate the one from the other toil for the most part in vain." Wolf ends the note by quoting Hesiod's dictum about the Muses; see above {ch I}. Friedrich August Wolf, *Prolegomena to Homer*. 1795, transl. and ed. A. Grafton, G.W. Most and J.E.G. Zetzel (Princeton 1985) 120f. *Prolegomena ad Homerum* 2nd ed. (Halle 1859) 71f.; cf. Grafton, *Defenders of the Text* cit. 214-43.

¹¹⁶ Virgil, ed. Heyne cit. II 1011 (Book 6, excursus 4).

¹¹⁷ Virgil, ed. Heyne cit. II 403f. (Book 2, excursus 3).

reminiscent of the antediluvian giants.¹¹⁸ With Niebuhr we have reached the point where historical scholarship begins to be dominated by the ideas of Romanticism. Historiography and mythology embark on their separate, though frequently interrelated, developments — highly sophisticated developments that in each case lie outside the scope of this study. Niebuhr knew the myths of early Latium and Rome to be myths. He loved and treasured them and shared them with his readers. He also tapped them to extract the sap of history. In the myth of the twin founders, Romulus and Remus, he recognized the traces of an archaic dualism. While such traces are not, as he thought, unique to Rome, his theory that originally two separate settlements were merged to create Rome pointed research in the right direction and is still debated.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Niebuhr, *Römische Geschichte* 3rd ed. cit. I 190-96. The work was first published in 1811.

¹¹⁹ Niebuhr, *Römische Geschichte* cit. I 231, 322ff.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HISTORIA AND FABULA IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

I

Limiting the Sway of Divine Inspiration

In New Testament studies the problem of fact versus fiction failed to gain prominence during the Early Modern Age. The short chapter we shall devote to the New Testament can, however, serve two purposes. The following survey will take us across the threshold of the nineteenth century and so prepare for the final sections of this study. The second, more important reason is that it will invite manifold comparison with our preceding examinations of Old Testament scholarship and the debate on early Rome. Thus it will point the way to some general conclusions on the progress of *historia* and *fabula*.

Formidable obstacles had to be overcome before a theory of myth could be applied to the Gospel. Troubling thoughts would have to invade the very centre of the Christian faith. When finally the notion of myth was introduced to the New Testament, it was done with both a thoroughness and a poignancy unparalleled in the texts we have examined in the two preceding chapters. The citadel was under assault. The shining knight in this amazing challenge — or to many the preposterous villain — was David Friedrich Strauss (1808-74). Among the many merits of his *Leben Jesu* (1835-36) was an awareness of the connection between ancient pagan philosophy and the beginnings of critical Bible exegesis. Strauss took comfort from the conclusion that the veracity of the Gospel was inevitably subject to critical testing. The events it narrated had been questioned right from the beginning. Indeed, they needed to be questioned in the same way as the tenets of pagan religions. The same mental attitude that had led Plato to question the Homeric deities¹ and Euhemerus to reduce them to human status induced the pagan Celsus to challenge Christianity.

¹ Plato, *Republic* 2.377f.

Origen, the Greek Father, saw this clearly. In *Contra Celsum* he wrote a passage which is quoted by Strauss in extenso:

An attempt to substantiate almost any story as historical fact ... is one of the most difficult tasks and in some cases is impossible. Suppose, for example, that someone says the Trojan war never happened, in particular because it is bound up with the impossible story about a certain Achilles, having had Thetis, a sea-goddess, as his mother ... How could we substantiate this, especially as we are embarrassed by the fictitious stories which for some unknown reason are bound up with the opinion, which everyone believes, that there really was a war in Troy between the Greeks and Trojans?... How could we prove the historicity of a story like this? ... Anyone who reads the stories with a fair mind ... will decide what he will accept and what he will interpret allegorically, searching out the meaning of the authors who wrote such fictitious stories, and what he will disbelieve as having been written to gratify certain people. We have said this by way of introduction to the whole question of the narrative about Jesus in the gospels, not in order to invite people with intelligence to mere irrational faith, but with a desire to show that readers need an open mind and considerable study, and, if I may say so, need to enter into the mind of the writers to find out with what spiritual meaning each event was recorded.²

One may perhaps question Strauss' statement that Origen here was "verging towards the more modern mythical view." Yet the passage is remarkable for inviting Greek-style rational criticism of the gospels, at least in theory. In practice, instances in which Origen rejects the historicity of the Gospel narrative outright are, as Strauss points out, "meagre in the extreme."³ No wonder that for a long time Origen's admonition had no more effect upon his readers than it had upon himself. It can be argued that a critical attitude towards biblical as well as classical texts did not develop until the age of Valla, Lefèvre d'Etaples and Erasmus, of whom the two latter were, in fact, great admirers of Origen.

In the seventeenth century two developments occurred that need to be recalled at this point. While classical scholars refined and perfected the methods of textual criticism, it fell to a biblical scholar to produce the first critical histories of a text. Richard Simon's *Histoire critique*

² Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.42; the translation is Henry Chadwick's (Cambridge 1953) 39f.

³ Strauss, *The Life of Jesus* cit. 39-43 (§§ 1, 2, 4).

du Vieux Testament (1678) has been examined earlier; his critical history of the New Testament (1689-93) will occupy us shortly. A curious trade-off followed these developments. It would seem that biblical scholarship provided the model for a critical history of a text and traded it to classical scholars, receiving in return from them a theory of myth. More than a century after Simon's pioneer efforts Friedrich August Wolf presented with his *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (1795) the first history of a text of classical Antiquity, which was in fact modelled on the precedent of Old Testament scholarship, especially, it would seem, Johann Gottfried Eichhorn's *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (1780-83).⁴ We noted earlier that Wolf did not adopt the theory of myth that Heyne, his teacher, had developed in his studies of those same Homeric texts. The ones to take up Heyne's theory were in the first place the Old Testament scholars Eichhorn and Gabler, while Strauss, the student of the New Testament, was to develop it in a new direction.

It was not by accident that the most pressing need for the notions of myth and mythical truth as opposed to historical truth were experienced among biblical scholars. Probing questions about the historicity of Romulus' adventures and similar tales had been asked even in Antiquity. Such questioning was resumed with a vengeance by the Fathers of the church and taken up afresh by the Renaissance humanists. Thereafter it caused even more vigorous debates in the days of Cluverius, Perizonius and Beaufort. But a magical formula had been available since Antiquity and continued to be used alike by those of a critical bent of mind and those of a traditional one. The magic word was 'uncertainty.' It was available to all who, like Livy, did not wish to either firmly assert or fully reject a tradition. In Christian studies, however, uncertainty was normally regarded with great suspicion. A Christian must say "yes" or "no" (Matt. 5.37; 2 Cor. 1.17-19). Adiaphoristic approaches were often seen as a screen for heresy. The historicity of biblical events, once the question was raised, had to be denied or defended, especially if they were reported in the New Testament. As Thomas Sherlock said of Christ's resurrection:

⁴ Wolf, *Prolegomena to Homer* cit. 15, 18.

There must of necessity have been a real miracle or a great fraud...
There is therefore here no medium; you must either admit the miracle
or prove the fraud.⁵

If the principal tenets of Christian theology and *Heilsgeschichte* were at issue, only sceptics could seek to hide behind a screen of neutrality. Even in the field of New Testament philology, scholars needed to tread with great caution when aiming for the kind of neutral advancement of knowledge that we have seen occurring in classical and Old Testament studies. The following, highly selective glance at critical New Testament scholarship will indicate the extent of self-imposed limitations. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that New Testament textual criticism, too, could proceed more freely, once the presence of myth had become an arguable hypothesis, at least in the more liberal schools of theology.

Between 1689 and 1693 Richard Simon strove to repeat for the New Testament what he had earlier accomplished for the Old. The three parts of his *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* are paralleled by three separate volumes published at short intervals, the *Histoire critique du texte du Nouveau Testament* (1689), the *Histoire critique des versions du Nouveau Testament* (1690) and the *Histoire critique des principaux commentaires du Nouveau Testament* (1693). Moreover, Simon here attained a final goal that had eluded him in the case of the Old Testament. His own French translation of the Gospel, scholarly and remarkably free from confessional bias, was published in 1702. Remarkable as Simon's critical contributions were in their time, they also had their limitations. His radical views on the writers of the Old Testament were not matched by his mostly traditional conclusions on the origins of the gospels. All four, he believed, were the authentic work of the four evangelists. Only the text of Matthew was a Greek translation of the apostle's Hebrew original, or possibly an abridgement by another author. Simon assumed that the gospels were written in the order in which they appear in the canon, although again he refused to speculate on the exact chronology, just as he had done in the case of the Old Testament.⁶

⁵ Thomas Sherlock, *The Tryal of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Christ*, 11th ed. (London 1743; repr. 1978) 31; see below pp. 321-24.

⁶ Richard Simon, *Histoire critique du texte du Nouveau Testament* (Rotterdam 1689) 95-98, 101f., 137f. and passim. Steinmann, *Richard Simon* cit. 257-96.

Critical scholarship also produced better editions of the original Greek text of the New Testament, after the so-called *textus receptus* had been reprinted virtually unchanged since the middle of the sixteenth century. John Mill in 1707, Johann Albrecht Bengel in 1734 and Johann Jakob Wettstein in 1751-52, while not seeing fit to correct the text itself, indicated in the notes of their editions what corrections they believed ought to be made. Johann Jakob Griesbach in 1774-77 and Karl Lachmann in 1831, finally, incorporated their emendations in the tradition-hallowed text. In short, the fiction that the Gospel, unlike the Old Testament, was impervious to change continued to be maintained for most of the Early Modern period, before scholars resumed the freer approach pioneered by Erasmus in the early sixteenth century. Moreover, Wettstein, Griesbach and Gottlob Christian Storr, despite his conservative theology of supernaturalism,⁷ followed up on Simon's initiative to clarify the history of the text. They attempted to establish an order of priority among the three synoptic gospels and other, hypothetical, sources. Storr, in particular, launched the theory which, with variations, today is widely accepted; he maintained that Matthew and Luke both depended on Mark.⁸

Johann David Michaelis, the German editor of Lowth,⁹ also studied the genesis of the New Testament. He was among the first to assume that a lost common source had been used in all three synoptic gospels. His chief merit, however, is a bold shift away from the doctrine of inspiration:

If the question is whether the Christian religion is divinely inspired, the authenticity, or lack of authenticity, of Scripture turns out to be more important than one might assume at first glance... Whether the books of the New Testament are inspired by God does not have quite the same importance for the Christian religion as that previous question whether they are authentic. ... Assuming that God did not inspire any of the books of the New Testament but simply left Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Paul the freedom to write what they

⁷ See above p. 262.

⁸ Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Oxford 1968) 103-25. Walter Schmithals, "Evangelien" in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, ed. Gerhard Krause et al. (Berlin 1977 —) X 570-626. Sebastiano Timpanaro, *Die Entstehung der Lachmannschen Methode*, 2nd ed., transl. Dieter Irmer (Hamburg 1971) esp. chs. 2 and 4.

⁹ See above p. 253.

knew, provided only that their writings are old, authentic and reliable, the Christian religion would still be the true one.¹⁰

As the emphasis on inspiration lessened, the problem of historical authenticity became steadily more crucial. In terms of the New Testament, authenticity meant above all proof that Jesus had done and said what the gospels reported he had, and ultimately that he had existed. It is to this problem that we shall now turn.

II

The English Deists

There were, of course, many sources of inspiration that led towards Strauss' investigation of myth and factuality in the gospel accounts of Jesus' life. We shall now turn to some impulses that came to him from England. *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) by John Locke (1632-1704) might of itself have convinced subsequent propagators of Deism that they had their work cut out for them. Locke taught, or at least seemed to teach, that as long as the essence of Christianity could be deemed reasonable, the remainder need not cause any concern. He also defined that essence, as he found it spelled out in the Gospel. It was the belief that Jesus was the Messiah and that he had lived, died and been resurrected, in order to reopen for all mankind the path to eternal life:

And therefore those who believed him to be the Messiah, must believe that he was risen from the dead: and those who believed him to be risen from the dead, could not doubt of his being the Messiah.¹¹

We shall see later that Jesus' Messianic mandate was just as crucial to Reimarus and Strauss. To them it was the idea which Jesus had

¹⁰ Johann David Michaelis, *Einleitung in die göttlichen Schriften des Neuen Bundes*, 4th revised ed. (Göttingen 1788) I 13f. The work was first published in 1750. Cf. Werner Georg Kümmel, *Das Neue Testament. Geschichte der Erforschung seiner Probleme*, 2nd revised ed. (Munich 1970) 50-54, 81-90.

¹¹ John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity, as Delivered in the Scriptures in The Works, A New Edition, Corrected* (London 1823) VII 20; cf. 9, 16f.

formed of himself over time and which he had instilled in his disciples. As far as Reimarus was concerned, however, Christ's alleged resurrection blatantly contradicted the Messianic mandate, as he understood it. The New Testament showed that Jesus himself did not expect that he would rise from the dead, nor did initially his disciples or anyone else. Rather, because his death had completely destroyed his claims to be the Messiah, the disciples had eventually to conceive the idea of Christ's resurrection and to invent a story to show how it had come to pass. While Strauss' interpretation of the Easter events was more cautious than that of Reimarus, they concurred on the central issue. If Jesus was historical, then the resurrection had to be *fabula*. The trail that led from Locke to Reimarus and Strauss was blazed, primarily, by the eighteenth-century school of English Deists.

What Deists of the various schools had in common perhaps deserves to be put in negative terms. It was the belief that no revealed religion was needed to appreciate the reality of a supreme being and its everlasting moral laws engraved in every human mind. It is true that *fabula* and *historia* to the English Deists were no more a central concern than to their French contemporaries, the *philosophes*, whom they so clearly influenced. Deism developed as a challenge of reason to supernaturalism, the dogmatic framework of Christian orthodoxy and the morality of the established church. These represented what was called at the time the "internal evidence" of Christianity. As Leslie Stephen puts it:

The argument on the internal evidence has the priority in the order of thought. The doubts as to the facts were preceded by the doubts as to the value of the established creed... Certain doubts about Eve's apple and Balaam's ass might be smouldering here and there, but they only gained importance as the creed with which they were held to be inextricably bound was assailed for other reasons.¹²

Despite this low priority of the narrative, many English Deists knew their Bible as well as did their orthodox opponents, but the use they made of it was necessarily negative. Its prime function was to provide evidence for the lack of reason, equity and sheer commonsense that

¹² Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* I 3.3. First published in 1876, this work has been reprinted several times. It is quoted here by volume, chapter and chapter section.

tainted Christianity. Since, moreover, the entire question of biblical fact was ancillary to the Deists, only the most salient points of the narrative elicited sustained discussion. These, however, were found in the New Testament. While the Old was not ignored and doubts about Balaam's ass were "smouldering here and there," the highly inflammable problems of Jesus' miracles and, especially, his resurrection deserved to be stirred more often.

One work in which both the Old and the New Testaments played an important role was an anonymous *Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* (1724), whose author was Anthony Collins (1676-1729), an Essex squire. He argued that the purpose of the New Testament was to demonstrate that Jesus was the Messiah, who had been announced in the Old. To prove this, the New Testament authors attempted to show that essential details of Jesus' life had been prophesied in the Old Testament. If their proofs were now found to be invalid, then Christianity had no sound foundation. The proofs were indeed invalid. If, for instance, Matthew (1.22-23) quoted Isaiah 7.14: "Behold a virgin . . .," it was clear that he disregarded the literal meaning of Isaiah's prophecy, which, in any event, had been fulfilled long before Christ's birth.¹³ The other prophecies proclaimed in the Gospel were equally deficient; even to accept them allegorically was wrought with perplexing difficulties. So, the readers who accept Collins' argument must indeed conclude that Christianity lacks a sound foundation. His thesis was developed in reply to the weird proposals of the mathematics professor William Whiston (1667-1752), who had likewise noted that the alleged prophecies in the Gospel did not well accord with the passages in the Old Testament to which they were supposed to refer. Whiston's explanation, however, had been that in the wake of Jesus' life and death the Jews had doctored their own Scriptures in order to confound the Gospel writers. Having understood this, Whiston gallantly set out to restore the corrupted readings. The point on which he and Collins were in agreement among themselves and also with Locke and Strauss was the crucial importance of Jesus' Messianic mission. To question Jesus' own and his disciples' awareness of that Messianic mission meant to cast doubt on the entire Christian creed. On the other hand, it was open to question whether the truth of the Christian religion

¹³ [Anthony Collins] *A Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* (London 1724) 31, 39-46. Stephen, *History of English Thought* cit. I 4.28-35, also for what follows here. William Neil in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. Greenslade cit. III 244f.

really needed to be proven with prophecies allegedly contained in the Old Testament. The majority of English Deists preferred to shift the burden of proof to the Gospel, and here they ignited a controversy that relegated the commotion caused by Collins, considerable though it was,¹⁴ to a distant second place.

If the New Testament was to supply proofs of Jesus Christ's divinity, attention immediately turned to the miracles he had performed, according to the gospels, and, even more so, to the divine miracles with which he had himself been favoured from his conception to his resurrection. What was at stake here was not the historicity of the human Jesus himself; however, many of the most crucial events reported in the gospels were suspect. The climactic controversy over the New Testament miracles began with the *Six Discourses on the Miracles of Our Saviour* (1727-29) by Thomas Woolston (1669-1733). Some years earlier, Woolston had lost his mental balance and also his fellowship in Cambridge. Whether he had regained the former by the time he was writing the *Discourses* has been questioned, but despite some offensive language, his style is lucid and his argumentation no more tortuous than that of his supposedly sane critics. He certainly never regained his appointment and even suffered imprisonment on account of this work. He died confined to his home. His basic contention in the *Discourses* is that the Gospel miracles never happened. Their

literal history ... does imply absurdities, improbabilities and incredibilities; consequently they, either in whole or in part, were never wrought ..., but are only related as prophetic and parabolical narratives of what would be mysteriously, and more wonderfully done by [Jesus].¹⁵

Woolston would stress the absurdity of an alleged occurrence, or suggest an explanation for it that did not defy the laws of nature, and sometimes he pushed both arguments simultaneously, unconcerned about the resulting contradictions. He protested his willingness to

¹⁴ Collins himself later listed thirty-five treatises that took up the issues he had raised, all published within a year or so. One of the more sensible replies he received was Thomas Sherlock's *Use and Intent of Prophecy in the Several Ages of the World* (London 1725).

¹⁵ Thomas Woolston, *A Discourse on the Miracles of Our Saviour*, followed by *A Second Discourse*, etc. (London 1727-29) II 3. Stephen, *History of English Thought* cit. I 4.45-49, also for what follows here. William Neil in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. Greenslade cit. III 245f.

believe the spiritual truth conveyed in each episode and cited Origen and Augustine as his models in this.¹⁶ Yet, in presenting the allegorizations he had found in patristic texts, he often succeeded in making them sound no less outrageous than the literal meaning.

A single example will suffice to demonstrate Woolston's inexhaustible bile. His observations on the Wedding of Cana, where Jesus turned water into wine (John 2.1-11), would later elicit passing comments even from the learned Strauss. Woolston assures his readers that to his own mind the presence of Jesus and his mother are sufficient proof that nothing untoward happened at the wedding feast. But ambiguity sets in at once. Jesus' purpose in accepting the invitation was

not so much to turn water into wine, as to make a proper discourse to the people of conjugal duties ...; tho we read not of a seasonable and good word spoken at it.¹⁷

Next, Woolston introduces an ancient commentator of the event. She is "the Empress Eudocia, a nursing mother of the Church," who "makes a sumptuous and voluptuous feast of it and writes of musick and dancing in abundance." The relevant Latin text is quoted in a footnote. Then, Woolston turns to another commentator purely of his own invention. This "supposed Jewish rabbi" is permitted a full fifteen pages for his diatribe. He maintains that Jesus and Mary were

merry folks in themselves, ... lovers of good fellowship and excess too... [and therefore] turn'd so large a quantity of water into wine, after all or most of the company were so far gone with it... Whether Jesus and his mother themselves were at all cut, as were the others of the company, is not so certain.¹⁸

The rabbi further maintains that Jesus caused perplexity to St. Augustine by addressing Mary as "woman" rather than "virgin" or "mother."

That Jesus ordered the huge jars first to be filled with water was "enough to make us think, that Jesus was but an artificial punch-maker. Could not he create wine without water for a transmutation?"

¹⁶ Woolston, *Discourses on the Miracles* cit. V 68.

¹⁷ Woolston, *Discourses on the Miracles* cit. IV 25.

¹⁸ Woolston, *Discourses on the Miracles* cit. IV 30-32.

In a passage noted by Strauss, the rabbi suggests that Jesus ordered strong liquor to be poured into water so as to fake wine for the benefit of a company that was no longer able to tell the difference. On the other hand, Woolston's rabbi predictably rejects an explanation attributed to Theophylactus "that the water might be used to abate of the immensity of the miracle."¹⁹ Woolston frankly admitted that his attack on the miracles was part of wider scheme to debunk the entire Gospel:

Besides Jesus's miracles, I am, as opportunity serves, to take into consideration some of the historical parts of his life and shew them to be no less senseless, absurd and ridiculous than his miracles. And why may I not sometimes treat on the parables of Jesus and show what nonsensical and absurd things they are?²⁰

Understandably, he sighed: "What a great deal of work have I upon my hands." It is not surprising that the *Discourses* were translated into French, probably by either Holbach himself or someone of his circle [Amsterdam 1768], and that Voltaire borrowed constantly from Woolston. Here was a source that even he, the champion jester, in Norman Torrey's words, "never had to overstate. Many times, when he cannot be so careful with his references, he rather understates."²¹

Of the dozens of replies and rejoinders called forth by Woolston's abrasive strictures again only one will be presented here. *The Tryal of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus* (1729) by Thomas Sherlock (1678-1761), future bishop of London, is original in its setting rather than its arguments. Thanks to its liveliness it has remained very readable. It also presents the orthodox position in a sensible way — which is no mean achievement, considering that in another reply to Woolston, Bishop Richard Smalbroke produced factual evidence that mountains had been moved by faith.²² Sherlock's pamphlet is presented as the record of a trial, English-style, before a judge and a

¹⁹ Woolston, *Discourses on the Miracles* cit. IV 41. Strauss points out against Woolston that it is unreasonable to deduce general intoxication from the steward's remark that usually the best wine was served before "the guests had drunk freely," rather than later, as on this occasion. Strauss, *The Life of Jesus* cit. 521, 525 (§ 103). For Voltaire's use of Woolston's arguments see Norman L. Torrey, *Voltaire and the English Deists* (New Haven 1930) 85-88.

²⁰ Woolston, *Discourses on the Miracles* cit. III 64f.

²¹ Torrey, *Voltaire and the English Deists* cit. 87.

²² Stephen, *History of English Thought* cit. I 4.51.

jury. Since it replies to Woolston's *Discourses*, the setting may have been inspired by the legal proceedings following their publication, but there is a clever twofold twist. Woolston was prosecuted for blasphemy; that he was found guilty did not of itself provide proof of the historical accuracy of the New Testament. Sherlock smartly turns the situation around. He has the apostles charged with giving false evidence about the resurrection. Thus Woolston, or rather the lawyer appointed to represent him, is made to accuse, not to defend. In fact, Sherlock calls him both, "counsel for Woolston" and "counsel for the prosecution." The verdict of not guilty, of course, is a foregone conclusion. Since the apostles did not lie, the resurrection must have happened as they said it did, and consequently Woolston's charges are proven to be false. And here comes the second twist. Since the defendants must be presumed innocent unless convicted, Woolston himself must be presumed guilty of slander throughout the trial. His counsel, rather than prosecuting, is always on the defensive. He was apparently appointed by the crown rather than chosen by Woolston, and his zeal leaves something to be desired. Right from the beginning the judge puts him in his place: "You see then, the evidence of the resurrection is supposed to be what it is on both sides, and the thing immediately in judgment is the value of the objections."²³ In other words, the general accuracy of the Gospel accounts is taken for granted and need not be proven; what must be proven is specific departures from that accuracy.

Having no new evidence, Sherlock had to make do with the arguments that had been used all along.²⁴ His situation invites comparison with that of the conservative writers on the origins of Rome. In both cases nothing even remotely resembling a public record existed. There were neither archival nor epigraphic sources; proof had to be derived uniquely from a historiographic tradition. In Rome's case, the most persuasive argument in support of the traditional tales came from the consensus among the ancient historians. Perizonius had used that argument rather sensibly. In the eighteenth century realm of reason, consensus was the best line of defense for orthodox Christians no less than for conservative classicists. But its strong appeal notwithstanding, when it was applied to the Gospel, considerable

²³ Sherlock, *The Tryal of the Witnesses* cit. 8. "Objection" is the term the judge uses in his summary to the jury (pp. 87ff.), when referring to the arguments of counsel for the prosecution. Stephen, *History of English Thought* cit. I 4.56-60.

²⁴ See e.g. Origen, *Contra Celsum* cit. 108-20 (2.54-67).

difficulties were encountered. Just with regard to Jesus' death and resurrection, consensus among the gospels did not go very far. Woolston had been aware of this circumstance, without really exploiting its potential.²⁵

In the crucial matter of Jesus' resurrection, consensus was sorely missing. Only Matthew (27.62-66) reports that the grave was sealed and guarded by soldiers on account of a prophecy that Jesus would rise again "after three days." Identifiable witnesses, i.e. those who had allegedly seen the risen Lord, were neither numerous nor impartial. Using an argument that had served as far back as Celsus, Woolston and his side could not emphasize enough that Jesus had failed to do the one thing that would have settled all doubts. Nobody ever claimed that he had shown himself to the High Priests or to any crowd of orthodox Jews.²⁶ Sherlock's counsel for the apostles, and also his judge in the summary to the jury, do what they can to invalidate this argument. It is not reasonable, they say, to expect random appearances of the risen Christ. He showed himself in sufficient measure to those especially chosen to give witness of him to the whole world. His mission within the confines of Jewish Palestine had ended with his crucifixion; so he had no business to show himself afterwards to hostile unbelievers. The chosen witnesses were persons of impeccable credentials and profound conviction. Their wisdom and their miracles persuaded countless others to follow Christ. Finally, they were willing to seal their testimony with martyrdom. That there had also been many martyrs for unworthy causes was true, but nobody was ready to die for a cause, unless he believed in it. If the apostles had faked the resurrection, they would have no reason to die voluntarily. In short, "if we see enough to judge that the first ages had reason to believe, we must needs see at the same time that it is reasonable for us also to believe."²⁷

The English controversy over Jesus' miracles and his resurrection would eventually abate. Peter Annet (1693-1769), who took up the cudgels for Woolston, was a late-comer. But like Woolston, Annet still came to grief over his publications. He lost his livelihood as a

²⁵ Woolston gives a list of miracles reported uniquely by John, whose purpose, he says, is deception. He also refers to discrepancies among the gospels; see his *Discourses on the Miracles* cit. II 10, III 14ff., 35f.

²⁶ Origen, *Contra Celsum* cit. 114 (2.63). Woolston, *Discourses on the Miracles* cit. VI 23-25. Cf. hereafter Peter Annet's argumentation.

²⁷ Sherlock, *The Tryal of the Witnesses* cit. 74-84, 100-9.

schoolmaster and was publicly exposed in the pillory. With Sherlock he deals severely; but without a theory of myth to resolve the conundrum of factuality, the debate was running dry. Annet examines the prophecy that Jesus would rise again "after three days," just as Jonah had emerged from the whale, after three days and three nights in its belly.²⁸ Like all commentators, Annet deals with the conflicting references to the duration of the two ordeals. Sarcastically he allows that the two "stories are parallel, that is, both alike true." But the striking parallel did not suggest to him, as it would to Strauss, that appropriate words were subsequently put into Jesus' mouth to create a mythical type.²⁹ Annet also dwells at length on Christ's failure, after the resurrection, to appear in public among the Jews. To do so, he admitted, would necessarily have established a tradition so strong as to be irrefutable.³⁰ Like Perizonius, he did not see that the solidity of a tradition does not determine whether the reported facts are historical. By the time Annet made his brave stand, David Hume's essay *Of Miracles* had appeared in print. Thanks to Hume the specific issue of the New Testament miracles could be seen again in a wider context, subsumed into the general Deist quest for a natural religion. Hume expected to settle the whole question of proof derived from the strength of a tradition. He proudly stated that he had discovered an argument that would be "useful as long as the world endures." His argument led him to the conclusion that "no testimony for any kind of miracle can ever possibly amount³¹ to a probability, much less to a proof."³²

²⁸ Matt 12.40, 16.21, 17.23, 27.63.

²⁹ [Peter Annet], *The Resurrection of Jesus Considered in Answer to the Tryal of the Witnesses* (London [1743?]) 28. Strauss, *The Life of Jesus* cit. 579f. (§ 114).

³⁰ Annet, *The Resurrection* cit. 71ff.

³¹ In the first edition (1842) the formulation was "has ever amounted" — an indication that when Hume wrote this the historical perspective, with the debate on the Gospel miracles at its centre, was uppermost in his mind.

³² David Hume, "Of Miracles" in *Essays Moral, Political and Literary in The Philosophical Works*, ed. T.H. Green and T.H. Grose (London 1882) IV 88-108, here 89, 105.

III

New Testament Myths; David Friedrich Strauss

The great English debate over Jesus' miracles and his resurrection did not address the central concerns of eighteenth-century Deism, nor did Woolston, Sherlock and Annet represent the most original level of English thought. The debate did, however, have wide repercussions on the continent. Moreover, with all the questioning of single incidents in Jesus' life as reported in the gospels, and with the even more detailed probing to come in the nineteenth century, the question to end all questioning became unavoidable. Was Jesus a historical figure? Weighty arguments for denying his historicity had been ready for some time. In particular, the few shreds of neutral evidence for his existence — evidence from pagan sources that could not be suspected of Christian self-interest — had all been recognized for what they were, crude fabrications of later periods. Only desperado apologists could explain the lack of non-Christian sources with the argument that those of Jesus' contemporaries who did not believe in his miracles had no reason to talk about him, while "those who believed them naturally and almost necessarily became Christians."³³

Was Jesus Christ historical? To reason that he was not, was the argument to settle all other arguments concerning his life and his leadership, and just for that reason it was often avoided. Down to the times of Strauss and his many opponents, the debate about the authenticity of Jesus' actions, whether natural or supernatural, was an endlessly satisfying pursuit. For the most sceptical-minded to state categorically that Jesus had never lived would have ended a favourite intellectual sport. This should explain why neither Holbach nor Voltaire showed any desire to deny Jesus' historicity flatly. Voltaire eagerly accused the English Deists of having done so,³⁴ but he would not do it himself. He cannot have wished to deprive himself of the source of his endless jibes about Jesus' draconic punishment of the figtree that had failed to refresh him with its fruits at a time when figs

³³ George Rawlinson, *The Historical Evidences of the Truth of the Scripture Records Stated Anew* (London 1859) 229.

³⁴ Voltaire, *Dieu et les hommes* (1769) ch. 31: *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Moland cit. 28.196.: "J'ai vu quelques disciples de Bolingbroke ..., qui niaient l'existence d'un Jésus..." Cf. Torrey, *Voltaire and the English Deists* cit. 13, 135.

were not in season.³⁵ He also needed Jesus as a mouthpiece for his own convictions: "*Je me flatte de démontrer que Jésus n'était pas un chrétien; qu'au contraire, il aurait condamné avec horreur notre christianisme, tel que Rome l'a fait ...*".³⁶ To gain a fair idea of the true Jesus, that "*Socrate rustique*," one ought to look at men like George Fox, the founder of the Quaker sect. A coherent picture of the Voltairean Jesus, who in some ways forecasts that of Ernest Renan, can be found in the article "Religion" (1771) of Voltaire's *Dictionnaire philosophique*. In a dream Voltaire meets Numa, Pythagoras, Zoroaster, Socrates and finally "*un homme d'une figure douce et simple*,"³⁷ whose name is never mentioned in the following conversation. The man wanted to be a good Jew, not the founder of a new religion. His life was lowly, poor and intinerant. Love of God and compassion was all he ever preached.

Had Jesus lived? Despite the coyness of leading sceptics, the question was asked. The Saxon chancellor, Friedrich von Müller, recalled a conversation between Napoleon and the German writer, Christoph Martin Wieland (1733-1813), when they met at Weimar in 1808:

And here [Napoleon] stepped up closely to Wieland and sheltered his mouth behind his hand, so that none except myself could hear it: "By the way, it is quite a big question, whether Jesus Christ has ever lived." Wieland, who so far had done no more than listen attentively, replied quickly and vividly: "I know very well, Sire, that there were some madmen who doubted it, but to me this seems as foolish as if one were to doubt whether Julius Caesar had lived or Your Majesty

³⁵ Mark 11.12-14, 21. Inspired by Woolston, Voltaire used the example of the figtree "some twenty-four times": Torrey, *Voltaire and the English Deists* cit. 82.

³⁶ Voltaire, *Dieu et les hommes* ch. 33, for what follows here also chs. 31, 35: *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Moland cit. 28.197, 203, 208. Marie-Hélène Coton, *L'Exégèse du Nouveau Testament dans la philosophie française du dix-huitième siècle* 353-57 (Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, vol. 220; Oxford 1984). Torrey, *Voltaire and the English Deists* cit. 134f., quotes Voltaire's *Lettres ... sur Rabelais*: "*Jésus a dit: Aimez Dieu et votre prochain, voilà tout l'homme. [Thomas] Chubb s'en tient à ses paroles; il écarte le reste. Notre Sauveur lui paraît un philosophe comme Socrate.*"

³⁷ Voltaire, *Dictionnaire philosophique*, Section 2, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Moland cit. 20.344-46.

is living. Thereupon the emperor patted Wieland's shoulder and said: "all right, all right."³⁸

A work that might have inspired Napoleon³⁹ to raise his "big question" was *Origine de tous les cultes ou religion universelle* (1795) by Charles-François Dupuis (1742-1809). Dupuis is blunt:

The existence of Christ, the restorer (*réparateur*), cannot be accepted as a historical fact, as little as the conversation between the snake and the woman [Eve] ... With a single blow we shall destroy the follies of the general public and those of the new *philosophes*, and at the same time we shall strip Christ of his two natures. The public takes him for a god and a man together; the contemporary *philosophe* takes him for a man only. We shall certainly not take him for a god, and even less for a man.⁴⁰

Under the Old Regime Dupuis had been named to the Académie des Inscriptions, and in the Republic he was at one time a candidate for the Directorate. Religion, he argued, answers an elementary human need; it came about as a cosmic cult of "*L'Univers-Dieu*" and was refined with the growth of astronomical knowledge. The historical religions, Christianity included, owed their existence to the craft of priests, who took advantage of the popular esteem for religion. With immense erudition Dupuis discovered a plethora of analogies between the tenets and practices of various religions. This to him was clear proof of their common origin. But despite his bold denial of Jesus'

³⁸ Friedrich von Müller, *Erinnerungen aus den Kriegsjahren 1806-1813* (Leipzig 1911) 182f. This work was first published in 1851. In the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (London 1878-89) XIII 657, Napoleon is made to talk to Herder rather than Wieland. See Albert Schweitzer, *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung* 9th ed. (Tübingen 1984) 451-53 (ch. 22), also for what follows here. The work was first printed in 1906. An English translation by W. Montgomery first appeared in 1910.

³⁹ Dupuis' *Origine* had been written some considerable time before it was printed. It seems to me likely that it influenced Constantin François de Volney's *Les Ruines* (1791), which had a very large circulation and was certainly known to Napoleon. Volney presents on just a few pages much the same theory as Dupuis expounds in four volumes. In contrast to Dupuis, though, Volney seems to retain at least the possibility of a historical Jesus: "... on attendit le réparateur; à force d'en parler, quelqu'un dit l'avoir vu, ou même un individu exalté crut l'être..." (ch. 22.13).

⁴⁰ Charles-François Dupuis, *Origine de tous les cultes ou religion universelle* (Paris 1795), edition in four 4°-size volumes, III pp. iv, 5. The work opens with a fine dedication to the author's wife for twenty-two years: "*L'éloge le plus grand, qu'on puisse faire de ton goût, c'est ton estime pour Voltaire.*"

historicity, Dupuis does not help our quest in that he completely fails to explain how the Gospel 'fiction' came about. Who adapted Mithras worship so as to form the Christian faith and practice? Who wrote the gospels? Who were Jesus' disciples and apostles — or were they too fictional? In short, when and how did Christianity begin? Dupuis does not say.⁴¹

Dupuis' lack of historical pragmatism is driven home by a comparison with Reimarus' *Apologie*, completed some thirty years earlier.⁴² The parts that concern us here must have been written in the wake of the controversy over Jesus that had been unleashed by the English Deists. It is here that we find a manifest and significant link between their thinking and the work of Strauss. Although Reimarus proceeded more intuitively and less systematically than Strauss, he anticipated the latter in that the factual trustworthiness of the Gospel was the question uppermost in his mind. He argued brilliantly that Jesus' understanding of himself as the Jewish Messiah meant that he envisaged the contemporary Jewish state and society as his field of action and future triumph. Now this expectation of temporal leadership precluded that he would have foreseen, and predicted, his violent death and subsequent resurrection. When Jesus' disciples buried their master, they had not the slightest reason to expect him to rise again. Reimarus' argument completely reversed the traditional position demonstrated above in Locke's words, according to which Christ's Messianic role and his resurrection were contingent upon one another. As Reimarus saw it, any hints of a future resurrection, which the gospels attribute to the mortal Jesus, were the creation of his followers, and so was, indeed, the risen Christ himself. When the disciples saw their expectation of a political Messiah dashed at Golgatha, they, in all probability, removed Jesus' body secretly from the grave. Then they smartly changed their testimony, replacing the political Messiah with an eschatological redeemer, who had suffered death, been resurrected and had ascended to Heaven from whence he would return.⁴³ Strauss would later attribute the eschatological

⁴¹ Dupuis, *Origine de tous les cultes* cit. I 3, II-2 161ff. and passim. On Dupuis see Frank E. Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods* (Boston, Mass. 1959) 263-70 and passim.

⁴² See above pp. 263-65.

⁴³ Reimarus, *Apologie* cit. II 179-83, 207f. and passim. Lessing's edition of seven *Fragmente des Wolfenbüttelschen Ungenannten* is based on an earlier, shorter version of Reimarus' text. See in this context the last two fragments: Lessing, *Werke*, ed. Göpfert cit. VII 426-57, 496-604. For Reimarus, see Schweitzer, *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung* cit. 56-68 (ch. 2).

concept to an evolution in Jesus' own thinking, which even his disciples were very slow to understand. Accordingly, he would remove the insinuation of craft on the part of the disciples and posit in its place a genuine and noble conviction gradually taking hold of Jesus' following. Otherwise he could adopt Reimarus' thesis without major modifications. Reimarus' importance does not lie in his vitriolic continuation of the sort of Bible criticism exercised by the English Deists. Rather he was the first one to extract from the garbled and mythicizing gospel narratives a coherent view of a historical Jesus, provocatively different from the tenets of traditional Christology. The course that would lead to Strauss and Renan was set.

David Friedrich Strauss (1808-74) was a gentle Württemberger, in his political outlook patriotic-minded and moderately conservative. His academic prospects were ruined beyond repair by the great, revolutionary book he wrote in his mid-twenties. Afterwards, his one academic appointment — to a theological chair in Zurich — was greeted with such an uproar by the orthodox rank and file that the government pensioned him off before he could even assume his duties. *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet* was published in 1835-36. In a revised edition, 1838-39, Strauss made a number of concessions to his critics, whereas the fourth edition of 1840 returned to the original text. This fourth edition had the good fortune of being translated by George Eliot.⁴⁴ Strauss' preparation was thorough; he expected the book in part to "serve as a repertory of the principal opinions and treatises concerning all parts of the evangelical history."⁴⁵ To Reimarus, in particular, he owed the quest for the historical Jesus; but when Reimarus wrote, Heyne's theory of myth had not yet been developed. Strauss had it as his disposal and in substance he adopted it. In fact, as he explained in his theoretical introduction, others before him had begun in a somewhat random fashion to apply Heyne's theory to the texts of the New Testament.⁴⁶ Strauss did so systematically and with a clear understanding of the peculiar problems involved. He insisted that one must never lose sight of the question whether the

⁴⁴ Except for the first 33 paragraphs, which also lack the complete footnotes. George Eliot's English version makes smoother reading, I think, than the German original, whose precision and cogency it retained.

⁴⁵ Strauss, *The Life of Jesus* cit. xxxi (Preface to the first German edition).

⁴⁶ Strauss, *The Life of Jesus* cit. 57-68 (§§ 9-12). Hartlich and Sachs, *Der Ursprung des Mythosbegriffes* cit. 61ff., esp. 79-87 on Georg Lorenz Bauer.

New Testament narrative reports factual events. Throughout his work he often scored well by showing the awkward consequences, when other writers had asked that question in some particular cases, while unthinkingly accepting the historicity of other circumstances. The truly difficult part of New Testament exegesis set in, whenever historicity had to be denied. Then the possibility that a myth was present must always be considered. In fact, to a believing Christian — and Strauss had not yet ceased to be one, at least by his own standards — it would offer welcome relief, for myth was anything but intentional deceit. Myths always proceeded from an idea, but they were rarely due to a single individual. In the New Testament myths occurred when a general idea that answered to collective expectations — for instance, the Messianic idea — was superimposed on to a historical narrative. This might be done either by transmuting the entire account or by adding details of a stereotyped nature.⁴⁷

In keeping with his understanding of the term, Strauss found rather more myths in the New Testament than would be admissible in light of the definition chosen for this study — mostly because he did not much insist upon the migratory nature of myth. But not even his youthful joy of discovery made him yield to the temptation of proclaiming everything for a myth that was not historical. Although he did not always carry through this distinction in practice, Strauss retained the term ‘legendary’ in reference to “misconstruction ... and confusion, the natural results of a long course of oral transmission,” without the motivating force of an idea. And he recognized that authors would make additions that were neither mythical nor legendary, but “designed merely to give clearness, connexion and climax, to the representation.”⁴⁸ The quality of Strauss’ work shows in his cautious admission that it was very difficult to identify New Testament myths with any real degree of certainty. He developed a series of criteria to indicate, negatively, the absence of historical fact or, positively, the presence of a myth, and he insisted that several of these criteria needed to coincide before one could reasonably pronounce a judgement. With great modesty he admitted that in the Gospel accounts

⁴⁷ Strauss, *The Life of Jesus* cit. 82-86 (§ 14). For Strauss in general, see Schweitzer, *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung* cit. 106-54 (chs. 7-9); Hartlich and Sachs, *Der Ursprung des Mythosbegriffes* cit. 121-47.

⁴⁸ Strauss, *The Life of Jesus* cit. 86f. (§ 15).

the boundary line, however, between the historical and the unhistorical ... will ever remain fluctuating and unsusceptible of precise attainment. Least of all can it be expected that the first comprehensive attempt to treat these records from a critical point of view should be successful in drawing a sharply defined line of demarcation.⁴⁹

When Strauss wrote, a general theory of myth was well developed and no longer controversial. Even its application to the New Testament was in itself no longer shocking. What brought down the anathema of orthodoxy upon Strauss' head was the extent to which he declared the reports on Jesus' life, death and resurrection to be mythical and consequently unhistorical. As Heyne's general theory was applied not only to the Old but also to the New Testament, it had to be amended and expanded. Strauss explains:

The chief difficulty which opposed the transference of the mythical point of view from the Old Testament to the New, was this: — it was customary to look for mythi in the fabulous primitive ages only, in which no written records of events as yet existed; whereas in the time of Jesus, the mythical age had long since passed away, and writing had become common among the Jews.⁵⁰

Myths were introduced, nevertheless. Their insertion was helped by the fact that for some time after Jesus' death there were no written records of his life. For Strauss' argumentation it was crucial that the traditional notion of the evangelists as contemporaries and even eye-witnesses to the events they described be completely abandoned. To do so was then gaining ground among most exegetical schools. Even if the lapse of time between occurrence and recording was generally considered to be modest, it could explain the large number of myths Strauss found in the accounts of Jesus' birth and early life.

As after the decease of celebrated personages ... so, after Jesus had become distinguished by his life, and yet more glorified by his death,

⁴⁹ Strauss, *The Life of Jesus* cit. 91 (§ 16).

⁵⁰ Strauss, *The Life of Jesus* cit. 57 (§ 9). Strauss was not the first to make this point. In 1802 Georg Lorenz Bauer had argued that myths could occur in the civilized time of Jesus no less than in the more archaic periods covered in the Old Testament. "*Sollte jetzt wirklich werden, was vorher mythisch war?*," he asked. See Hartlich and Sachs, *Der Ursprung des Mythosbegriffes* cit. 85.

his early years, which had been passed in obscurity, became adorned with miraculous embellishments.⁵¹

The same occurred in the case of Jesus' death; the accounts of his resurrection, in particular, Strauss would necessarily regard as mythical. In this case, moreover, mythicization began very early — not quite as soon, though, as Acts 1-2 suggested. Acts had the disciples return to Jerusalem seven weeks after their master's death. On the day of Pentecost they announced publicly his resurrection. Privately they were

themselves already convinced of it on the second morning after his burial. ... It might certainly require some time for the mental state of the disciples to become exalted in the degree necessary, before this or that individual amongst them could, purely as an operation of his own mind, make present to himself the risen Christ in a visionary manner; or before whole assemblies, in moments of highly wrought enthusiasm, could believe that they heard him in every impressive sound, or saw him in every striking appearance.

Still, the idea of resurrection, with various details borrowed from Old Testament types in line with the developing Messianic-eschatological tradition, was applied to Jesus by his immediate disciples. So much Strauss retained as historical. He even thought that he could determine the place and time where it began. It was in their native Galilee, where the disciples had returned after Jesus' execution and

gradually began to breathe freely. ... Here also, where no body lay in the grave to contradict bold suppositions, might gradually be formed the idea of the resurrection of Jesus.⁵²

If we accept Strauss' view, we will find ourselves a long way not only from the prehistorical age of myth but also from the approximately two centuries that, as Mircea Eliade and others found, did often pass before the consciousness of historical reality would fade to the point that myth could infiltrate it.⁵³

More specifically, how Strauss perceived mythical ideas to override historical fact may be exemplified with his discussion of Jesus' birth.

⁵¹ Strauss, *The life of Jesus* cit. 57f. (§ 9).

⁵² Strauss, *The Life of Jesus* cit. 743 (§ 140).

⁵³ See below p. 402.

Luke is the only evangelist to give a detailed account of the events (2.1-20). He assumed that Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth in Galilee. Strauss imagines Luke desperately looking for ways to get them from there to Bethlehem in Judaea, where Mary, in particular, even if her pregnancy had not rendered her unfit for travel,

had nothing to do ... The Evangelist, however, knew perfectly well what she had to do there; namely to fulfil the prophecy of Micah (5.1), by giving birth, in the city of David, to the Messiah. ... So he sought after a lever which should set them in motion towards Bethlehem, at the time of the birth of Jesus. Far and wide nothing presented itself but the celebrated census.⁵⁴

Then there were the angels announcing the saviour's birth to the shepherds in the field. Others before Strauss, for instance G.L. Bauer and Gabler, had recognized the angelic intervention as an offering to popular Messianic expectations. But then Gabler had failed to see that, in addition to the angels, the shepherds and the stable too were mythical. They belong

to the same machinery by which Luke, with the help of the census, transported the parents of Jesus from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Now we know what is the fact respecting the census; it crumbles away inevitably before criticism, and with it the datum built entirely upon it, that Jesus was born in a manger. For had not the parents of Jesus been strangers, and had they not come to Bethlehem in company with so large a concourse of strangers as the census might have occasioned, the cause which obliged Mary to accept a stable for her place of delivery would no longer have existed. But, on the other hand, the incident, that Jesus was born in a stable and saluted in the first instance by shepherds, is so completely in accordance with the spirit of the ancient legend, that it is evident the narrative may have been derived purely from this source.⁵⁵

The intellectual pleasure of reading Strauss is evident, but it is not the only justification for choosing him, despite his nineteenth-century dates, as a finale for this examination of *historia* and *fabula* in the Early Modern Age. Not until it was applied to the New Testament could the implications of Heyne's theory of myth be fully gauged. Not

⁵⁴ Strauss, *The Life of Jesus* cit. 156 (§ 33).

⁵⁵ Strauss, *The Life of Jesus* cit. 159f. (§ 33).

until the uproar caused by Strauss' deflation of the supernatural Jesus did Western civilization establish a workable set of requirements for the documentation of both historical fact and historical myth or legend. Westerners have, as it were, become programmed to ask: is that story true? So much so that, ever since, they have had difficulties in coming to grips with other cultures, which have kept aloof from routine questioning of this kind. We stand at the end of a long development that began in spot check-fashion during the Renaissance. The progress was, as we have seen, tortuous. Misdirected reasoning, as with Kircher's Tower of Babel or Caze's royal Joan of Arc, led into blind alleys. The theory of accommodation, as Semler used it, obstructed the proper understanding of myth, and so did late explosions of Euhemerism in works such as those by the abbé Banier and Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus.⁵⁶ Instances of hypercriticism, such as Voltaire's denial of the historical Moses and Dupuis' denial of the historical Jesus, point forward to more disciplined manifestations of scholarly obsession in the nineteenth century.

In the nineteenth century mythology became fully established as an autonomous scholarly discipline. While this study is not concerned with the progress of mythology as such, Strauss' *Life of Jesus* calls attention to one development that greatly affects the interplay between *historia* and *fabula*. When, with Heyne, the modern notion of myth first appeared, it was confined to a remote past of archaic prehistory. The formation of myths was attributed to a long process of oral transmission. While parallels between the primordial age of myth and primitive cultures in the contemporary world had been noted from the time of Fontenelle, 'mythical' and 'primitive' had remained inseparable and often synonymous notions. So much so, that Heyne had refused to apply the term 'myth' to Virgil's and even Homer's elaborations of the pristine tales. Strauss realized that his work significantly modified this concept. The myth of Christ's resurrection had been born and taken a firm hold among the first generation of his disciples, in the fully literate society of the Augustan empire. Not that the notion of a mythical age preceding the historical ones had lost validity for the future. The construction remained solid and capable of expansion, so that it could later accommodate the ideas of Bachofen, for instance. But it was Strauss, who truly initiated the modern study

⁵⁶ Strauss, *The Life of Jesus* cit. 49 (§ 6). Schweitzer, *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung* cit. 88-96 (ch. 5).

of the genesis of myths. In large measure he was able to do that, because the period he studied was relatively recent and well documented. In the Euhemeristic tradition myths were identified as such and used as the starting point for a hypothetical, and often wildly speculative, reconstruction of factual events that had subsequently been mythicized. Heyne and Eichhorn also analysed myths to infer historical situations. Strauss reversed the procedure. He established what was acceptable to him as historical fact and then proceeded to analyse, by way of hypothesis, the subsequent transformation of fact into myth or legend.

In conclusion it should be emphasized again that within the context of this study the achievement to crown the progress of reason in the Early Modern Age was the systematic separation of *historia* and *fabula*, that is to say, the identification of myths and legends in the transmitted body of historical narrative, and their elimination as this body was passed on. Achievements do get challenged, though. In the nineteenth century we shall encounter the view that demythicization had gone far enough, and perhaps too far. Mythmaking then seemed a more wholesome exercise.

CHAPTER NINE

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

I

The Romantics and Mythology

In the preceding chapters we have looked at scholarly work on the Old Testament, the Trojano-Roman tradition and the New Testament and seen how in each of these three fields the existence of *fabula* alongside *historia* was eventually documented. This breakthrough might have offered an ideal point to terminate this study. The author has had to overcome considerable reluctance before he decided to continue, especially as the nineteenth century does not lead up to comparable landmarks and the accumulation of relevant material makes selection even more difficult — if this were possible — than has been the case with previous periods. The consideration that has prompted the resolve to venture on is this. To stop with the breakthrough might have left the impression that an intellectual quest that had begun in ancient Greece was now finally settled. It might have been thought that since Romulus and Caesar, Noah and David no longer shared the same reality, historical fiction and fact could be confused no longer. Never mind, if many details remained to be settled and the broad public still needed to be persuaded. The boundary line was defined; with proper application one would be able to trace it in every written record of the past. Such an impression, however, would be misleading. *Historia* and *fabula* do not part company. They did not in the nineteenth century and probably never will.

For the discipline of history the nineteenth century has no equal. The masses of source material made accessible and analysed, the new elaborations of the philosophy of history and, finally, the interest for things past generated in every walk of life — all must in retrospect seem staggering. In the course of so much thinking and writing about history, no matter how one reacted rationally and emotionally to the breakthrough, there was no denying that it had happened and brought results that would not go away. All the way down to Strauss' *Life of Jesus*, published in 1835-36, the progressive exposure of myths was

a result of critical reasoning, a noble achievement of the Age of Reason. This meant that for those who remained attached to the traditional amalgams of fact and fable, rational argumentation was not a suitable expedient to promote their cause. We have earlier referred to Chateaubriand, who treated reasoning almost provocatively in a cavalier fashion and relied on the grandeur of emotion to present a view of the past consonant with divine revelation and the Catholic faith. His writings helped launch the nineteenth-century passion for history as a source of uplifting sentiment and valuable knowledge.¹ In the broadest sense, Chateaubriand was one of the great instigators of the Romantic movement.

Romanticism was an outstanding source of new emotional and intellectual experiences in the early nineteenth century; it also affected every aspect of the relationship between *historia* and *fabula*. If Enlighteners and Classicists had striven for clarity, visibility, focus, balance and, above all, mastery, Romantics permitted themselves to be overpowered by the deep and the dark. Feelings and premonitions took the place of precise concepts; extravagance and mystery replaced harmony. The world of myth spoke to the Romantic condition as naturally as did the Alps, atlantic gales and oriental bazaars. Human existence was like an iceberg; the surface was dwarfed by what lurked underneath. The shallowness of the present and the discomfort of the future could be redeemed by the nurturing awareness of the past. Everything had deep and mighty foundations in the past. While nations, families and individuals were rooted in the historical past, human society at large answered to basic patterns that could best be fathomed in the profundity of archaic myths, although some might also be revealed by the customs of primitive tribes in the contemporary world.

By the middle of the nineteenth century ethnology had joined mythology and history in the ranks of autonomous disciplines. National Societies and museums were founded. In 1869 a lectureship in ethnology — the first of its kind — was established in the University of Berlin for Adolf Bastian. Since Columbus, curiosity for faraway peoples and their customs had not ceased to grow. Their significance had been underlined by Montesquieu's comparative study of laws, religions and cultures as well as by Herder's and Rousseau's

¹ Cf. above p. 262. "*Sans Chateaubriand, qui sait si l'on eût eu Michelet?*" So asked Gustave Lanson, *Histoire de la littérature française*, 9th ed. (Paris 1906) 894.

enthusiasm for the moral superiority of simple societies. The Romantic movement contributed an abiding interest for oriental religions and languages, the extent of which can be encompassed with the names of Joseph von Görres (1776-1848) and Max Müller (1823-1900). Affinities between the customs described in ancient myths and those observed among modern savages had been noted since the eighteenth century.² They came to pose intriguing problems for Bachofen, to whom we shall soon turn, and after him to various schools of modern anthropology. In the further course of this investigation, ethnology cannot, however, be considered; nor can we be concerned with the development of mythology and history per se. The zones of friction and cross-fertilization between *fabula* and *historia* that remain to be studied are all located in the fringe area of the historical discipline, some of them along its frontier with mythology — a frontier that for long remained disputed.

In the following section we shall glance at two extreme and opposite developments with a view of sizing up the relationship between *historia* and *fabula* in the nineteenth century. Throughout all previous periods we encountered the tendency to mistake inventions and fabrications for authentic fact. Not before the nineteenth century did the opposite become a significant factor, namely that authentic accounts were scrutinized and in an excess of scholarly suspicion declared to be fakes. In such cases, *historia* was demoted to the rank of *fabula* and, as we shall see, rehabilitating it was not easy. If historicism at its height was marked by such incidents of hypercriticism, it could, on the other hand, not eliminate the staying power of unquestioning attitudes. Tradition-hallowed views continued to be professed by many respected historians, sometimes on the basis of ideological predetermination. With some of the myths and legends examined in the preceding chapters it was thought helpful to trace the developments as far as the nineteenth century. Here we shall briefly recall these cases and show how by the middle of the nineteenth century critical historicism coexisted with accomplished mythmaking.

The third section of this chapter will lead to Bachofen. He needs to be given his place in the ongoing debate about pre-Roman Latium, the Trojan descent and the beginnings of Rome. Apart from biblical

² The Jesuit Joseph François Lafitau (1681-1740) compared the social organization of the Iroquois and the Huron with information obtained from Herodotus and other classical authors in his *Moeurs des sauvages américains, comparées aux mœurs des premiers temps* (Paris 1724). See also above p. 283, on Fontenelle.

studies this debate presents perhaps the most significant instance, in which the historicity of mythical material was defended in a scholarly fashion. Bachofen's study of pre-Roman Italy prepared him for his *tour de force*, the thesis of a matriarchal age at the dawn of human society. In Bachofen's *Mutterrecht*, the mythical age itself is mythicized, but in that mythicized form it is presented in terms of history rather than mythology. If Bachofen is exemplary for the preservation of a synthesis between myth and history, the nineteenth-century sequel to the debate on Genesis presents a final parting of the ways. In the fourth section it will be shown that historians generally retreated from Genesis. If biblical scholars cared to have Genesis assessed from the secular viewpoint of the social sciences, they had henceforward to turn to mythology; if they wanted to defend its factual truth, they would have to argue their case against scientists, in particular geologists. The fifth and last section, finally, examines the treatment of historical subjects in nineteenth century art. History painting, in particular, was then at its peak and apt to demonstrate another typical dilemma produced by the inevitable interaction between *historia* and *fabula*.

II

Hypercriticism and Nationalism

Someone ought to undertake a comprehensive analysis of historical hypercriticism. Throughout the history of critical scholarship it was inevitable that right would occasionally be mistaken for wrong. At the turn of the eighteenth century Jean Hardouin fell victim to a debilitating overdose of scholarly suspiciousness.³ Not until the nineteenth century, however, did conditions prevail that encouraged sane and serious scholars to assume that every text they set eyes on might as well be a fake. Until this phenomenon is properly studied we are left with the vague notion that excesses of criticism occurred frequently. As historical source texts were exposed to extensive scrutiny, a growing number of them was found not to be authentic. It

³ See above p. 304.

must be expected that in the large majority of cases the verdict was correct and that records judged to be spurious were indeed fabrications. There were, however, cases of miscarried judgement, and some were significant. Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (c. 480-524/25) presented one such case. After many months of imprisonment in Pavia, the ex-consul was put to death on orders of the Ostrogothic king Theodoric. Today their conflict is no longer attributed to religious motives, but from the early Middle Ages Boethius was revered as a Catholic martyr. None other than the future Pope Sylvester II extolled his uprightness and saintly death in an inscription composed for the monument to Boethius that Emperor Otto III erected in Pavia.⁴ Doubts about Boethius' religion arose in the nineteenth century. His famous *De consolazione philosophiae*, written in prison, never refers to the Christian faith. There were, however, five treatises of Christian theology, and according to the early manuscripts, Boethius was the author, but this attribution could not be confirmed independently. On the assumption that Boethius was a pagan, his authorship of the theological treatises was promptly denied, most cogently perhaps by Friedrich Nitzsch in 1860.⁵ Twenty years later Arturo Graf devoted a chapter to Boethius. While other medieval legends about classical authors had long died, Boethius' false reputation for more than nominal Christianity and even martyrdom was, it seemed to Graf, a singular exception.⁶ In fact, Saint Severinus Boethius had always been venerated in Pavia and in 1883, just after Graf's attack, the Vatican explicitly sanctioned the local custom. Boethius' Christianity, was not, as Graf thought, an outgrowth of medieval fabulizing overdue for scrapping. Thanks to the concerted efforts of several scholars, Boethius' faith, though not his martyrdom, was finally vindicated. Alfred Holder discovered a fragment written by Boethius' friend, Cassiodorus, that permitted the experts to confirm the authenticity of four of the theological treatises.⁷ Only one, *De fide catholica*, remains controversial. *De consolazione*, too, in no ways contradicts Christian tenets. The section on Free Will (5.2-3), it is

⁴ MGH, *Poetae latini* V, ed. K. Strecker and G. Silagi (Leipzig-Munich 1937-79) 474f.

⁵ Friedrich Nitzsch, *Das System des Boethius und die ihm zugeschriebenen theologischen Schriften* (Berlin 1860).

⁶ Graf, *Roma nella memoria* cit., ch. 18, II 322-67. This work was first published in 1882-83.

⁷ Hermann Usener, *Anecdota Holderi* (Bonn 1877). August Hildebrand, *Boethius und seine Stellung zum Christentume* (Regensburg 1885).

now argued, uses a terminology with which a pagan would not have been familiar.⁸

In 1826 the first volume of the *Monumenta Germaniae historica* appeared. Never before had the historical records of the Middle Ages, both literary and documentary, been scrutinized with the kind of thoroughness that became the trade-mark of this magnificent enterprise. The first two generations of *Monumenta* scholars were engaged in an unrelenting quest to uncover medieval forgeries. Under their discriminating eyes many documents and whole chronicles turned out to be spurious. Probing the authenticity of every line was clearly justified, but it also became an obsessive pursuit that could entail neglect of other criteria. Authenticity, narrowly interpreted, could mean that only those parts of a narrative mattered, which covered the chronicler's own experiences. What he had compiled from earlier sources, guided by his personal view of history as a whole, was less important. In compliance with this principle the *Monumenta* suppressed all but one thousandth of the gigantic *Speculum historiale* of Vincent of Beauvais.⁹ Another flagrant example is the treatment of Otto von Freising in the *Geschichtschreiber der deutschen Vorzeit*, the series of German translations that accompanied the critically edited texts of the *Monumenta*. Of the eight books of Otto's chronicle only the sixth and seventh were accorded the honour of a translation.¹⁰ They were deemed relevant because they dealt with Otto's own times. The other six books, which cover the course of the world from Adam to doomsday and exhibit the true depth of the greatest historical mind of the German Middle Ages, were left aside.

Paul Scheffer-Boichorst (1843-1902) was for some years a work horse in the *Monumenta* stable, charged with the particularly burdensome task of editing Alberic of Troisfontaines, before he could advance to chairs of medieval history, from 1876 in Strasbourg and from 1890 in Berlin. He was a somewhat eccentric and formidably pugnacious man with a sharp mind and a great love of truth. "The authenticity of historical narratives of the Middle Ages has been a

⁸ *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, ed. Klauser cit. II 482-88. See also Howard Rollin Patch, *The Tradition of Boethius. A Study of His Importance in Medieval Culture* (New York 1935); Edmund Reiss, *Boethius* (Boston, Mass. 1982).

⁹ This is the estimate of Haeusler, *Das Ende der Geschichte* cit. 73.

¹⁰ Vol. 57 of the *Geschichtschreiber der deutschen Vorzeit*, tr. H. Kohl (Leipzig 1894). Cf. Werner Kaegi, *Chronica mundi. Grundformen der Geschichtschreibung seit dem Mittelalter* (Einsiedeln 1954) 12f.

lively concern with me,” he said in 1900 when taking his seat in the Royal Prussian Academy — a point readily confirmed by his bibliography.¹¹ In the selection of his research projects Scheffer allowed himself to be inspired by what others had recently accomplished. In 1868 Wilhelm Bernhardt had proved that the alleged diaries of Matteo Spinelli da Giovinazzo, reputed to be the oldest vernacular source of Neapolitan history (1247-68), were faked in the sixteenth century. Scheffer followed suit and, in 1870, proved as much for the allegedly oldest vernacular chronicle of Florence, written under the names of Ricordano and Giacotto Malispini. This success encouraged him to take on the major work that came next after the Malispini chronicle in the Florentine historical tradition, the *Cronica* of Dino Compagni (d. 1324). In Italy Compagni was being compared to Herodotus, Thucydides, Caesar and Tacitus and dubbed the Italian Sallust.¹² On the other hand, in 1858 Pietro Fanfani had expressed doubts about the authenticity of Compagni’s chronicle. Scheffer took note; even as he destroyed the Malispini chronicle, in 1870, he boasted that Florence ought to dread the day when its “Thucydides would be assaulted by the critical mind of a German,” and four years later he struck.¹³ Unfortunately for Scheffer, Compagni was not a fraud. The so-called “Dino controversy” continued to rage for about two decades, with various German and Italian scholars getting into the fray on either side. Scheffer himself wrote several more pieces in defense of his thesis that the chronicle had been fabricated in the seventeenth century by members of the Florentine Crusca academy, but when confronted with the existence of a hitherto unknown fifteenth-century copy, he conceded defeat. He did so courageously both in his afore-mentioned installation speech at the Berlin academy and on other occasions. Isidoro Del Lungo (1841-1927) was the Italian scholar who gave a decade of his life to the salvaging of Compagni’s

¹¹ After his death, a number of Paul Scheffer-Boichorst’s *Gesammelte Schriften* were published as vols. 42 and 43 of *Historische Studien* ed. E. Ebering (Berlin 1903, 1905). The first vol. opens with Scheffer’s biography by F. Güterbock (pp. 3-62); the second vol. closes with the “Antrittsrede” here quoted (pp. 393-95) and the bibliography of Scheffer’s publications.

¹² For the Compagni controversy and its participants, see Girolamo Arnoldi’s excellent article on Dino Compagni in the *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* (Rome 1960 —) 27.629-47.

¹³ Paul Scheffer-Boichorst, *Florentiner Studien* (Leipzig 1874). The first of the three studies brought together in this volume was the critique of the Malispini chronicle, reprinted from *Historische Zeitschrift* 24 (1870) 274-313; I am quoting p. 313. The second piece, printed for the first time in 1874, was entitled: “Die Chronik des Dino Compagni eine Fälschung” (pp. 45-210, esp. 47).

authenticity and originality.¹⁴ By 1900 the "Dino controversy" was over, but *fabula* will not die. Half a century later a publishing house known for its scholarly bent agreed to launch a book arguing that the author of Compagni's chronicle was none other than Dante Alighieri.¹⁵

Looking back to Scheffer-Boichorst, it is worth pointing out that the reasoning that had prompted his suspicions is highly characteristic of the mid-nineteenth-century infatuation with infallibility that reached from religious dogma to the law of the conservation of energy. What Scheffer found so hard to accept was that Compagni's chronicle, a work of absorbing interest, could also be riddled with contradictions and factual errors. The evidence for hypercriticism could be multiplied. Konrad Justinger (d. 1438), for instance, the secretary and first chronicler of the city of Bern, presents a counterpart to Dino Compagni. Attacks upon the authenticity of his chronicle persisted for decades. As late as 1906 the Bern professor Ferdinand Vetter argued at great length that the work could be traced back no farther than the last third of the fifteenth century and had very little to do with Justinger, who had died half a century earlier. Today it is generally accepted that we possess a manuscript fragment of Justinger's autograph.¹⁶ We cannot attempt here to assess the extent to which hypercriticism occurred. It should be noted, though, that the phenomenon as such was bound to affect the perception of historical authenticity. Before the nineteenth century, critical minds had usually been proved right in the end and the defenders of historical traditions wrong. Although this was often not recognized at the time, the conservatives were fighting a losing battle. Their concerns might be honourable and even valid, but their reasoning was faulty. With the nineteenth-century hypercritics we find that pattern reversed. Elaborate

¹⁴ Isidoro Del Lungo, *Dino Compagni e la sua cronica* (Florence 1879-87) 3 vols.; for a full bibliography of his efforts see L. Strappini's article in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* (Rome 1960 —) 38.96-100.

¹⁵ Elisabeth von Roon-Bassermann, *Die Weissen und die Schwarzen von Florenz. Dante und die Chronik des Dino Compagni* (Freiburg, Herder 1954). See also James Westfall Thompson, *A History of Historical Writing* (New York 1942) I 475: Thompson continues to treat Compagni's chronicle as a forgery and compares it to the Spinelli diaries, "another notorious forgery of Florentine [!] history." He berates the unforgivable negligence of scholars who accept Compagni (because, unlike himself, they have done their homework).

¹⁶ Feller and Bonjour, *Geschichtsschreibung der Schweiz* cit. I 27f. Hans Strahm, *Der Chronist Conrad Justinger und seine Berner Chronik von 1420* (Bern 1978) 11 and passim. Ferdinand Vetter, "Neues zu Justinger ..." *Jahrbuch für Schweizerische Geschichte* 31 (1906) 109-206.

application of critical methodology did not automatically lead to correct results. There was authenticity beyond the facts that pragmatic historical research could establish at one time or another. Traditional views were vindicated with the help of new evidence, and superior scholarship produced a more cogent, and also more considerate, argumentation.

Fear of excessive criticism sometimes motivated historians of great distinction. If in some cases it led to the rehabilitation of authentic traditions, it could also cause the retention of legends and myths within the framework of history. Pragmatic approaches were sacrificed because it was feared that relentless critique of unauthentic detail might render historians blind to the genuine substance. Frivolous fault-finding and arrogant alteration — these were the grave reproaches that Bachofen levelled against Niebuhr and Mommsen.¹⁷ Of the mythistorical heroes encountered earlier in this book, William Tell¹⁸ deserves to be recalled in the present context. At the turn of the nineteenth century Johannes von Müller (1752-1809) was widely considered to be the most eminent and uplifting contemporary historian. In the first version of his *Geschichten der Schweizer* (1778), while upholding Tell's historicity, he omitted the central episodes of the traditional saga. Heedful of the preceding revelations about appleshooters in Scandinavian mythology, Müller restrained the stately flow of his narrative, but he mellowed with subsequent revisions of his text, following the ancient chronicles ever more closely. In the final edition of his history (1806) he even reinstated the apple-shooting.¹⁹ After Müller, however, the thorough researches of Joseph Eutych Kopp provided ample evidence that neither the existence of Tell nor that of Gessler could be documented from the archival sources. Conservatives, including the great Jacob Burckhardt, refused to accept the implications of Kopp's work,²⁰ but in the second half of the nineteenth century the critical view came to prevail, at least among academic historians.

Sober historical assessments of Tell had always to contend with ideology. As radical idol of the French revolutionaries Tell was

¹⁷ See below pp. 355-58.

¹⁸ See above pp. 169-79.

¹⁹ Feller and Bonjour, *Geschichtsschreibung der Schweiz* cit. II 634f, 649. Edgar Bonjour, *Studien zu Johannes von Müller* (Basel 1957) 250.

²⁰ Werner Kaegi, *Jacob Burckhardt. Eine Biographie* (Basel 1947-82) II 361-68.

repugnant to the conservative circles of the Restoration period. Kopp's case is curious but typical. The radical historical pragmatism that he displayed in his work on the origins of Switzerland was stimulated by an abhorrence of liberal politics that he shared with his employer, the government of Lucerne. While conservative ideology thus sponsored radical scholarship, conservative historiography helped Tell become a standard-bearer of liberalism. Müller's respectful recasting of the older tradition, while eventually rejected by the professional historians, gained universal popular acceptance throughout Europe and beyond, because it was taken up by Friedrich Schiller and used to shape the plot of his play on Tell. Thanks to Schiller, the grim tyrannicide of Jacobin fame became again a symbol of high-minded struggle for freedom and morally justified rebellion. Moreover, in his *Wilhelm Tell* Schiller never had recourse to the wild defiance of historical fact that had two years earlier characterized his *Jungfrau von Orleans*.²¹ The play on Tell laid claim to a faithful rendering of the events and, being widely accepted as such, firmly implanted the traditional tale in the mind of the masses. It is true that Schiller knew the apple-shooting to be "a fairy tale," but he judged it to be indispensable for his dramatic purpose. Müller had acted as a scholarly consultant to Schiller; the huge success of the latter's play must have encouraged him to reinstate the apple-shooting in the final version of his Swiss history. In the face of such deeply rooted popularity, scholarly scepticism could not prevail; in fact, as we have seen, in the twentieth century even the odd professional historian was again prepared to break a lance for Tell's historicity.

Politics also permitted other myths and legends to enjoy a sheltered existence on the fringe of nineteenth-century historiography. We have previously dealt with the emperor Barbarossa, who passed the centuries hibernating in the Kyffhäuser mountain until he was stirred to new life and glorious action in the days of Bismarck's unification of Germany. Barbarossa's awakening, as we have seen, was the work not only of poets but also of some highly-placed academics.²² The latter did not, of course, maintain that the medieval emperor had survived in the flesh to become the new *Kaiser*. The claim of demonstrable survival and concrete, if intermittent, presence through the centuries was conveniently transferred to the *Kaiseridee*, of which

²¹ See above p. 166f.

²² See above p. 143.

the old myth was declared to an authentic and enduring expression. Likewise for political reasons — confessional politics in this case — some respectable nineteenth-century historians found the legend of Popess Joan irresistible. In relating it, they claimed, not that the popess had existed, but that the opposite could not be proved.²³ If protestant historians thus indulged in ambiguity, conservative Catholics damned the classic and sparkling exposure of medieval pope-legends produced by Johann Joseph Ignaz Döllinger (1799-1890), pillar of the romantic Catholic renewal.²⁴

The Romantic movement imbued the nineteenth century with a great love of myths and legends. Other examples discussed earlier in this book can serve to show how even fully historical characters had their cocoon of fancy preserved and further developed. Unlike Barbarossa in his Kyffhäuser, Arminius had never lost his historical identity. In the sixteenth century Hutten had conferred a dual accolade on the Cheruscan chief. He had presented him as the liberator of the Germanic tribes, which was historically sound, and also as their unifier, which was less so. At the beginning of the nineteenth century this twin emphasis was taken up, as we have seen, by Kleist. Later, as the Germans were moving forward from the freedom struggle against the Napoleonic order through the dismal decades of the Restoration period towards Bismarck's unification, Arminius became primarily the harbinger of national unity.²⁵ Once more, *fabula* won out over *historia*. Arminius' transformation is reflected in the painfully slow progress of the great monument in the Teutoburg Forest, which was conceived before 1848, but not inaugurated until 1875 in the presence of the new *Kaiser*. National symbols were nothing new, but the mass culture of the nineteenth century required them to be visible with a hitherto unknown omnipresence. This universal need for public display combined with an unprecedented enthusiasm for history and myth to put selected heroes of the past quite literally on a pedestal. William Tell, Barbarossa, Arminius and

²³ See above p. 103.

²⁴ *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York 1907-22) V 98. Alain Bureau, "Döllinger und die 'Päpstin' Johanna" in *Geschichtlichkeit und Glaube. Zum 100. Todestag Johann Joseph Ignaz von Döllingers (1799-1890)*, ed. G. Denzler and E.L. Grasmücker (Munich 1990) 391-94.

²⁵ See above {p. 185f. Kuehnemund, *Arminius* cit. 104f., cf. below pp. 390, 392.

others such as Vercingetorix, Arminius' French counterpart²⁶ — all were inspiringly looking down on the crowd from the height of their public monuments. Tell also joined a variety of female national symbols then in their heyday, a Britannia, a Germania, an Austria, a Bavaria, a Helvetia etc., whose effigies appeared on coins, stamps, picture post-cards and so on. Here it is appropriate to recall Joan of Arc. The Maid had always been a heroine of mythical proportions, but not until the early nineteenth century did she become a national symbol, the lone daughter of history amid so many allegorical maidens representing the nations of Europe.

Joan of Arc became the most attractive and the most versatile of all national symbols. Her virtues ranged from devout piety to military prowess; she even transcended the aura of secular nationalism to attain universal sainthood. No other author of the nineteenth century, and probably none of any other century, has done as much for her as Jules Michelet. The most remarkable French historian of his age excelled in reworking old historical myths and creating new ones. We have earlier glanced at him perpetuating the myth of the year 1000 and draping a Faustian cloak around the shoulders of Pope Sylvester II.²⁷ Michelet's greatest mythical creation was France herself, a female collective *persona* he would call *La France*, *la nation* or *le peuple*. While each name carried peculiar connotations, he often used them interchangeably, and when he looked for an embodiment, it was usually Joan who came to mind. In all of history there were no more inspiring sights than the noble nation of twenty million revolutionaries and the Maid of Orleans. In the final paragraphs of the preface to his *Histoire de la Révolution française* (1847) Michelet confessed:

Personne ne verra cette unité merveilleuse, un même coeur de vingt millions d'hommes, sans en rendre grâce à Dieu. Ce sont les jours sacrés du monde, jours bienheureux pour l'histoire. Moi, j'ai eu ma récompense, puisque je les ai racontés... Jamais, depuis ma Pucelle

²⁶ See Graus, *Lebendige Vergangenheit* cit. 256-60. After the defeat of 1870 the French were encouraged to identify with the Gauls, whereas formerly the Germanic Franks and the Romans had been more fashionable. Graus mentions bronze statues of Vercingetorix, the Gaul, in Gien, Bordeaux and Clermont-Ferrand, all erected between 1887 and 1902. Graus also discusses the vicissitudes of St. Wenceslas and Charlemagne, who were seen as national symbols in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: *Lebendige Vergangenheit* 178-80, 195-98.

²⁷ See above pp. 114, 214.

d'Orléans, je n'avais eu un tel rayon d'en haut, une si lumineuse échappée du ciel...

"*Ma Pucelle d'Orléans.*" The famous essay on the Maid had been composed for the fifth volume of Michelet's *Histoire de France*, which was published in 1841, but Paul Viallaneix has shown that Joan's image had formed in Michelet's mind between 1829 and 1837, in the course of repeated presentations of her life and times. What rendered her unique to Michelet was not so much her visions, the miraculous appearances of her saints, but the moral reform that she effected through her actions and her words.²⁸ In crucial moments the whole French nation rose to the sublime standards of morality that Joan had set for it. So it did in 1789, achieving that "*unité merveilleuse*" of twenty million Frenchmen, regardless of social divisions. So it did in the revolution of July 1830, which to Michelet was the experience that sparked his enthusiastic assimilation of the entire nation to Joan of Arc. In 1831 he wrote:

Ce que la révolution du Juillet offre de singulier, c'est de présenter le premier modèle d'une révolution sans héros, sans noms propres; point d'individu en qui la gloire ait pu se localiser. La société a tout fait. La révolution du XIV^e siècle s'expia et se résuma dans la Pucelle d'Orléans, pure et touchante victime qui représenta le peuple et mourut pour lui. Ici pas un nom propre; personne n'a préparé, n'a conduit; personne n'a éclipsé les autres. Après la victoire, on a cherché le héros; et l'on a trouvé tout un peuple.

The July revolutionaries no longer needed a Joan to represent them; they were Joan. It is true that the French could achieve Joan's moral perfection only in exceptional moments. More typically the nation had shed its purity and turned to Machiavelli; it had been vicious, although never depraved.

*Notre vertu, à nous, ce n'est pas l'innocence, l'ignorance du mal, cette grâce de l'enfance, cette vertu sans moralité; c'est l'expérience, c'est la science, mère sérieuse de la liberté.*²⁹

²⁸ See Viallaneix's introduction in: Michelet, *Oeuvres complètes* cit. VI 9-11; also Viallaneix's ed. of Jules Michelet, *Jeanne d'Arc et autres textes* (Paris 1974) 276-316.

²⁹ Michelet, *Oeuvres complètes* cit. II 254f. (*Introduction à l'histoire universelle*).

In vital moments, however, that secular mood was set aside and French nationhood became a truly religious experience. In an extraordinary text of 1833 Michelet evoked the people recreating Christ in a chain of successive historical incarnations and, in the process, creating and recreating itself:

Le peuple, tout en obéissant au prêtre, distingue fort bien du prêtre le saint, le Christ de Dieu. Il cultive d'en âge en âge, il élève, il épure cet idéal dans la réalité historique. ... Tout à l'heure l'idéal généralisé va s'étendre dans le peuple; il va se réaliser au XVe siècle, non seulement dans l'homme du peuple, mais dans la femme, dans la femme pure, dans la Vierge; appelons-la du nom populaire, la Pucelle. Celle-ci, en qui le peuple meurt pour le peuple, sera la dernière figure du Christ au Moyen Age.³⁰

Figura Christi — Michelet reinterpreted that age-old mystical image just when David Friedrich Strauss engaged in his rational search for the historical Jesus. Michelet's Joan was at the same time the reincarnation of Christ and the model of the French nation. When did nineteenth-century historiography move farther away from its standard goal of pragmatism? The idea that collective national characteristics can be identified and played off against those of other nations is probably as old as nationhood itself. Renaissance humanists indulged in such an exercise. Michelet's contemporaries in the Romantic school of history were fully committed to the idea that nations and states were a kind of collective individuals, the products of separate, though parallel, developments rather than universal conditions. They were "God's thoughts," said Leopold von Ranke,³¹ and even the pragmatic historiography of the nineteenth century unfolded in accordance with that basic premise. When Michelet evoked *La France* he was, however, closer to myth and mystery than to pragmatism. When he writes of France, or for that matter of Joan of Arc, the singular intensity of his prose is highlighted by words like 'the heart' and 'love.' His biographers cannot help pointing out that the elaboration of his *Pucelle d'Orléans* coincided with his emotional as well as intellectual involvement with Françoise-Adèle Dumesnil. How could

³⁰ Michelet, *Oeuvres complètes* cit. IV 723, VI 10. In general see Paul Viallaneix, *La Voie royale. Essai sur l'idée de peuple dans l'oeuvre de Michelet* 2nd ed. (Paris 1971).

³¹ Leopold von Ranke, "Politisches Gespräch" in *Geschichte und Politik*, a selection of Ranke's writings ed. by Hans Hofmann (Leipzig 1936) 99. Cf. Kaegi, *Jacob Burckhardt* cit. II 56f.

such harmonious agitation of heart and mind fail to bring about a rapprochement between *historia* and *fabula*?

After Michelet, Joan truly belonged to the French nation; her popularity reached a level unmatched by that of any other national hero and sustained until after the Second World War. At the beginning of her fine survey of these developments, Marina Warner looks at sculptural monuments in order to capture the wide range of the passions Joan incited. From a new monument erected in 1803 at Orleans, which represented Joan "as a species of Marianne, spirit of the Republic," Warner takes us to Domrémy, Joan's birth-place. There, besides the bridge across the Meuse, she stands raising her sword, between the protective arms of a majestic France, who is draped in a fleur-de-lys cloak and wears a French royal crown. This Joan, the work of Antonin Mercié, was installed in 1902. Yet another Joan is encountered on the hills above the valley, on a spot where Joan had conversed with her saints. In fact, André Allar's bold group shows the three saints towering over the peasant girl. It was erected in 1891 when the adjacent huge basilica was still under construction.³² By the end of the nineteenth century the inspiration worked by Joan was truly universal. In France it reached from the left-wing radicals to the ultra-nationalist right; beyond France Joan appealed to millions of devout Catholics.

III

Bachofen

Critical historical scholarship developed sound principles for the extraction of factual evidence from documents, narratives and archaeological sources. There were strict criteria for factuality; when these were not met, was there any information about the past that could be accepted as reliable? By the end of the eighteenth century it had become difficult to maintain that a historical tradition, even if supported by many authors over a long time, could be accepted as the sole, or at least the principal, guarantor of truth. While the nineteenth-

³² Warner, *Joan of Arc* cit. 255f. and plates 35f.

century schools of pragmatic historiography were largely content to equate authenticity with factuality capable of solid documentation, the new understanding of myth called for a notion of historical truth that was not tied to documented facts. So the old problem again needed to be addressed: apart from *historia*, could *fabula*, too, furnish authentic truth? We have seen how Heyne struggled with that problem without finding a satisfactory solution. Before Heyne, Herder had been willing to throw historicity to the winds in favour of a poetic truth speaking to the heart rather than the mind.³³ And Vico attempted a systematic investigation of what he termed *storia ideal eterna*, that is the evolution of natural laws invested in a collective ability to form and express spontaneous judgements based on commonsense. Vico insisted that this ability was shared by "an entire class, an entire people, an entire nation or the entire human race." In postulating collective spontaneous action as a historical force, Vico also spoke for his French translator, the young Jules Michelet.³⁴ The idea of a historical truth that was vested in the hearts of people collectively and, in consequence thereof was spontaneously intelligible to the hearts of later generations, appealed to the entire Romantic movement. At the same time, however, nineteenth-century scholars renewed the search for a more scientific approach to non-factual authenticity. Perhaps one should not expect to find one that was fully rational, but at least it ought to be methodical.

Eventually a clear division was bound to occur; pragmatic historians must respect factual authenticity, while mythologists recognized a non-factual authenticity. In pursuit of the latter the mythologists came to rule out that the criteria of pragmatic history could be applied to myth. The sphere of myth lay beyond the boundaries of chronology, geography and prosopography.³⁵ The world of primeval myth, in particular, was not simply another 'age,'

³³ See above p. 255f.

³⁴ Vico, *La Scienza nuova seconda* cit. 77f. (§§ 141-45). Cf. above pp. 251-53. Jean Gaulmier, *Michelet* (Brussels 1968) 31-35.

³⁵ History analyses developments; every historical occurrence is rooted in preceding ones. Myth, according to modern definitions, is archetypal; it cannot have a past. See Eliade, *Cosmos and History* cit., esp. 44: "The memory of the collectivity is anhistorical." *Der Mythos von Orient und Occident. Eine Metaphysik der alten Welt. Aus den Werken von J.J. Bachofen*, a selection ed. by Manfred Schroeter, with an introd. of nearly 300 pages by Alfred Baeumler, 2nd ed. (Munich 1956) xc-xciii. (Baeumler's introduction was also published separately under the title *Das mythische Weltalter*, Munich 1965). Schrey, *Mythos und Geschichte bei Johann Arnold Kanne* cit. 88.

which, although prehistoric, could still be investigated with methods acceptable to the critical historian. Yet this was exactly what a number of Romantic mythologists attempted to do. That the attempt was bound to fail might have been clear from the outset, but an element of rebellion was inherent in all causes taken up by the Romantics. Perhaps this is why some scholars refused to accept that the methods of non-factual authentication, which they developed for the study of myth, would preclude a mythical age within historical space. Analogously, they failed to see that only in exceptional cases the development of a myth can be analysed historically in terms of successive stages. Paradoxically, the latest and greatest of these Romantic rebels was Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815-87), otherwise a man of extremely conservative views. In turning directly to Bachofen, we shall ignore the work of historical mythologists like Friedrich Creuzer (1771-1858), Joseph von Görres (1776-1848) and Karl Otfried Müller (1797-1840). Nor shall we deal with Johann Arnold Kanne (1773-1824), who after due consideration tended to deny the existence of historical myths, as defined by Heyne.³⁶ Bachofen's debt to these and other preceding scholars remains to be fully investigated. On the other hand, his own work adequately exposes the aspects of Romantic mythology relevant to this study.

After studies in Berlin, Göttingen, Paris and London. Bachofen returned to live in his native Basel.³⁷ Until his marriage at the age of fifty he also travelled extensively and with gusto. Inherited wealth permitted him to live most comfortably off the proceeds of his investments. His participation in public life was slight; the quintessential private scholar, he was also a very private person. Despite his remarkable charm and wit, he had few friends and regular correspondents. To see his publications critically reviewed in learned journals or even ignored by the scholarly world, caused him to be sarcastic and bitter on many occasions. But it never induced him to

³⁶ Schrey, *Mythos und Geschichte bei Johann Arnold Kanne* cit., esp. 31-41, 81-103. For an analysis of Bachofen's sources of inspiration, see Baeumler's introd. to *Der Mythos von Orient und Occident* cit.; Lionel Gossman, *Orpheus Philologus. Bachofen versus Mommsen on the Study of Antiquity* (Philadelphia 1983) 8-20, 42-79.

³⁷ For Bachofen's life, see Karl Meuli in the critical edition he directed until his death: Johann Jakob Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* (Basel 1943 —) III 1012-79; Lionel Gossman, "Basle, Bachofen and the Critique of Modernity in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century" *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 47 (1984) 136-85, esp. 136-73. Philipp Sarasin in *Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815-1887). Eine Begleitpublikation zur Ausstellung im Historischen Museum Basel 1987* (Basel 1987) 28-39, cf. 15.

doubt the justness of his methods and his cause. As a writer, he was uncompromising in his polemical asides and, more significantly, in his expectation that the readers would put up with the intricate and cumbersome structure of his argumentation. He would untiringly search for the perfect formulation in which to cast his crucial ideas. But he also ran the risk of losing his readers in a maze of endless, detailed evidence. He believed that exhaustive evidence, methodically presented, rendered his conclusions irrefutable, and he frequently said so. What he did not see was that his interpretation of the evidence was highly subjective and dictated by preconceived ideas. A strikingly original mind, he pursued his own train of thoughts in defiance of the scholarly conventions of his day and, in doing so, sometimes ended up supporting outdated and justly discredited traditions.

Bachofen's intellectual Odyssey would soon take him into uncharted waters, but it began on familiar ground with the history of pre-Roman Italy and early Rome. One might say of his approach that he carried on where Perizonius had left off.³⁸ The traditions developed by the ancient writers would have to be accepted with a grateful heart, unless they were demonstrably wrong. That witnesses ought not to be disbelieved without good reason is a sound principle, but to Bachofen the veracity of the ancient historians became a matter of irrational, almost religious, conviction. A side-glance at his religious faith is indeed appropriate here. Bachofen has been presented as a profoundly religious nature.³⁹ This is true to a point, I think. God, the *liebe Gott* of German pietism,⁴⁰ had given him his wealth and his intelligence — gifts that he accepted along with the reality of their heavenly donor in the spirit of unquestioning, child-like gratitude. Religion to him was a function of his conservative ideology; spiritual commotion as it was experienced by a Martin Luther or a Søren Kierkegaard, was not called for. Bachofen's profoundly moving experiences were reserved for the student of the vast and stirring mysteries of ancient symbolism and myth. It was nice to be on safe ground as a church-going Christian. It was equally reassuring to read Virgil and Livy without undue scepticism. In fact, the daring of Bachofen's sallies into the

³⁸ See above pp. 301-3.

³⁹ Karl Meuli in Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. III 1078. On Bachofen's religion, see also Gossman, *Orpheus Philologus* cit. 47f., 65f.; Gossman, "Basle, Bachofen and the critique of Modernity" cit. 183f.

⁴⁰ See e.g. Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. X 294f. (letter 173).

turbulent oceans of myth may have required the comfort of a safe anchorage in familiar traditions.

For a considerable time the defence of that safe anchorage remained the overriding concern of Bachofen's scholarship. In that spirit he undertook to join his former teacher, Franz Dorotheus Gerlach (1793-1876), in writing a *Geschichte der Römer*. The first volume, reaching to the end of the Roman monarchy, was published in 1851 and never received a sequel. Gerlach was a kindred spirit who shared Bachofen's extreme conservatism but lacked his intellectual alertness. The sections dealing with the foundation of Rome and the seven kings fell to Gerlach's share in the joint enterprise. This is how he handled the problem of historicity when preparing to give the traditional account of Romulus' life:

The crowd does not act; it drifts and is driven. Only a man who has gained deep insight into his time, who is endowed with exceptional force, who feels in himself that destiny had called him to bring forth a new age, can meet the requirements of true creation. Therefore mythistory (*die Sagengeschichte*) has created personalities — collective notions, as they are called — who united in themselves the aspirations of a great mass. This is not done merely to satisfy a psychological law; rather the psychological law meets the reality of facts or the historical necessity which only knows the actions of individuals, not those of the masses. As a general rule, whatever is by necessity anchored in human consciousness must be reflected in the reality of things.⁴¹

It seems thus that mythistory creates a kind of substitute factuality. Bachofen would have agreed with all his heart as he might have seen here the methodological principle that later governed his work on the age of myth. In the age of myth, he believed, no facts as such can be critically ascertained, but the inner condition of human nature can, and in its light the symbolic language of tales and artifacts can be interpreted. The information thus obtained is authentic; it will often be obscure and uncertain, but in some very important matters it is as clear and reliable as a factual account.

Bachofen's share in the *Geschichte der Römer* includes chapters on the geography of west-central Italy, the pre-Roman tribes located in

⁴¹ Friedrich Dorotheus Gerlach and Johann Jakob Bachofen, *Die Geschichte der Römer* (Basel 1851 —) I-2 5.

that region and Roman constitutional law. The treatment in each case shows characteristics that can serve as a key to his subsequent work. The chapter on geography reveals his deep love of the land and the people of the Rome and her region, conceived in the course of several lengthy stays in the eternal city. These pages reflect the perceptive attention of a fine observer, wandering patiently through urban ruins and hillside fields and villages. The first two of his five visits, in 1842-43 and 1848-49, left Bachofen determined to forsake Roman Law, the field of his academic training and teaching, and devote himself entirely to the history and art of the ancient world. At the same time his peculiar interest in symbols and myths, especially the representations of both in sepulchral art, was awakened.⁴²

The chapter on pre-Roman tribes and their settlements offers the first published statement of Bachofen's lasting aversion to the pragmatic-critical school of Roman historiography. Niebuhr, the revered founder of that school, is subjected to sharp and explicit criticism.⁴³ Bachofen saw in him the influential model of a misplaced and arrogant confidence to know Roman history better than the ancient historians — a mortal sin that was to be committed afresh, and in infinitely more unpardonable fashion, by Theodor Mommsen.⁴⁴ Mommsen's *Römische Geschichte* would not begin to appear until 1854; yet Bachofen's chapter on the Roman constitution reveals in advance why he would fulminate against Mommsen's classic with all the ferocity of which he was capable. Niebuhr had pioneered the view that Roman history began with scattered pastors and hamlets rather than an enlightened act of city-founding — a view that was soon to be canonized by Mommsen. Bachofen, by contrast, averred the historicity of Romulus and his six successor kings in terms that seemed to brush aside even Gerlach's previously quoted prevarications. He bewailed that the new school of critical history "dissolved the great historical figures of the early monarchic period into allegorical phantoms" and

⁴² On Bachofen's travels, in particular his visits to Rome, see Karl Meuli in Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. III 1053-65.

⁴³ Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. I 142, 147, 182, 190; cf. 490-98 (Introduction by Matthias Gelzer).

⁴⁴ Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. X 114f. (letter 67). Whereas Niebuhr had presented the Trojano-Roman tradition in a spirit of respectful scepticism, Mommsen ignored it as totally irrelevant. For Bachofen's private thoughts about Mommsen, see his letters: *Gesammelte Werke* cit. X 251-53, 261-63 (letters 143 and 150), cf. 136 and *passim* (Index). For an evaluation, see primarily Gossman's two studies cit.

that it “transformed historical events into cycles of legends.”⁴⁵ The lasting achievement of the Roman monarchy — Bachofen actually says “everlasting” (“*ewiglich*”) — was the creation of the apparatus of government (“*Magistratur*”). It was a triumph inspired by faith. “Wherever anything outstanding is achieved, it owes its existence to trust in the assistance of heavenly powers.” Only religion could account for Rome’s conquest of the world.

The Roman state rests on a divine base; its apparatus of government is the expression of a higher, divine power and all its constituents are permeated and sustained by religious ideas. At no time have these ties between the terrestrial state and the transcendental world been severed.

Here we have reached the innermost core of Bachofen’s resolve to defy the critical school of ancient history. The secular approach characteristic of Niebuhr and Mommsen is patently and hopelessly wrongheaded.

The Roman nation, imbued as it is with its faith in a continuous, uninterrupted revelation of heavenly powers, can only be understood by such as have been touched by the breathing of that same spirit.⁴⁶

It has justly been pointed out that his constant appreciation of the religious dimension afforded Bachofen an insight into the reality of Roman life, which Mommsen, for all his masterly reconstruction of Rome’s constitution, could not match.⁴⁷ What is important for our inquiry is that Bachofen’s solemn regard for religion goes a long way to explain his seemingly absurd defence of historicity. If Roman kingship is the work of divine providence and understandable only to the pious historian, rejecting a historical Romulus and Numa must seem as pernicious as rejecting a historical Adam, Eve and Noah had seemed to most historians prior to the nineteenth century. This is not to say that Bachofen saw himself as a kind of high priest of a sacred Roman tradition. His passionate curiosity for the remote past and its relics was basically modern and secular; his subsequent works on myth dealt with communist organization of life and sexual issues in a

⁴⁵ Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. I 335.

⁴⁶ Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. I 269-71.

⁴⁷ Karl Meuli in Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. III 1038f.

matter-of-fact fashion that shocked many contemporary readers. Even his conservatism was pragmatic. His emphatic contention that ancient Rome exhibited a divine and imperishable order of politics was also a defence of the order of things in old Basel an order that provided him with ease and *joie de vivre*, but in the 1850s was threatened from every side. His treatment of the Roman constitution resembles frequently a panegyric on the patrician class which, he believed, had at all times mediated between the exercise of democracy and divine providence. Again the analogy with contemporary Basel is unmistakable. In some ways he is not unlike Mommsen whom he criticized so savagely for discussing ancient Rome from the perspective of a nineteenth-century liberal Prussian.⁴⁸ Mommsen actually wrote a scathing review of the *Geschichte der Römer* produced by his colleagues in Basel. In it he epitomized Bachofen's treatment of the Roman constitution: "Sovereignty, says the author, rests with God, not with the people. Whosoever does not believe that, let him be anathema!"⁴⁹ The point was well taken. In a letter to a close friend Bachofen compared himself to Niebuhr and showed a fine sense of balance when talking of his ideals:

I am conservative and not destructive. I continue to believe that Livy, Cicero and Dionysius knew a good deal more about the nature and the history of their people than did Niebuhr. The student of history listens and explains; he does not master and he does not destroy. ... My ideology (*Weltanschauung*) is a different one; it is much more confined, more bourgeois, and perhaps also more religious.⁵⁰

The vindication of early Rome against the misrepresentations of Niebuhr and Mommsen continued to be Bachofen's goal in life. "Mommsen and Roman history: this is now my task," he exclaimed in a letter of

⁴⁸ See, for instance, a letter taking issue with the third edition of Mommsen's *Römische Geschichte*: "Besonders eckelhaft ist die Zurückführung Roms auf die Lieblingsideen des flachsten modernen Preussischen Kammer-Liberalismus. Der ganze Jargon des Demagogen kommt schon in der Königszeit vor, so dass alles unter die elendesten Ideen subsummiert und dadurch vollständig auf den Kopf gestellt wird. Die einzige bewegende Kraft dieses alten Lebens ist Handel und Wandel. Da liest man beständig von Einfuhr und Ausfuhr, Handelsbilanz, Speculation, Concurrenz ...". See Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. X 252; cf. also 261f. (letters 143 and 150, written in 1862).

⁴⁹ Theodor Mommsen, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin 1905-13) VI 653f.; cf. Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. I 282f.

⁵⁰ Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. X 114f. (letter 67).

1862.⁵¹ This was not meant to refer narrowly to a defence of the Trojano-Roman tradition and its concomitants. An autobiographical sketch composed in 1854 explains: "I would like to attempt a history of Italy down to the disappearance of its tribes, with a view of developing in this work the spirit of ancient peoples and times in every direction."⁵² This ultimate ambition was never achieved, but in partial fulfillment Bachofen came to write his decisive works on symbols and myths in the ancient world: *Versuch über die Gräbersymbolik der Alten* (1859), *Das Mutterrecht* (1861), *Die Unsterblichkeitslehre der orphischen Theologie* (1867) and *Die Sage von Tanaquil* (1870).

The *Unsterblichkeitslehre* can serve as an introduction to Bachofen's efforts to establish non-factual authenticity in the context of ancient culture. The dissertation is focused on a single object, a polychrome vase with paintings and plastic figures found in a tomb in Apulia. The text covers two hundred pages, but Karl Meuli, who edited it in the Collected Works, required no more than ten pages to show that in the light of current understanding almost every detail of Bachofen's interpretation is wrong.⁵³ Convinced of the uniqueness of his vase, Bachofen saw no need to compare it with other specimens of the same type, which would have precluded some unjustified generalizations. He assigned the vase to the late third century B.C., reaching with questionable arguments a correct conclusion.⁵⁴ More importantly, he was also right in associating the vase with a philosophical doctrine of immortality ("*Unsterblichkeitslehre*"), which assumed that its teachings had originated in the earliest times and therefore chose to express them with archaic symbols and myths. This was indeed characteristic of the — relatively recent — period to which the vase belongs, but the doctrine's claim to great age, which Bachofen made his own, was wrong. He assumed, as he always did, that basic principles of religion, formed in a remote age of myth, had retained static validity throughout ancient civilization. Such a misplaced confidence in continuity encouraged him to explain the symbols of his vase in the light of texts considerably younger than the vase itself. He had a valid and deep understanding of the religious ideas of late Antiquity and, like the Neoplatonists themselves, boldly

⁵¹ Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. X 252 (letter 143).

⁵² Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. III 1080, IV 517.

⁵³ Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. VII 492-501; cf. III 1075f.

⁵⁴ Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. VII 11f., 508.

traced them back to "Pythagorean" and "Orphic" impulses at the very dawn of civilization and, even more boldly, to divine inspiration in the Christian sense.⁵⁵

Bachofen's vase with its symbolic imagery is real, of course, and so are the texts that he used to interpret it. But the central points of his argument, the great age and permanency of the ideas represented by the artifact, cannot be documented in a factual manner. Bachofen is on thin ice when he claimed, first, that the religious imagery of his vase corresponded to the syncretism and Neoplatonism of his texts, which were written centuries later, and, second, that both represented the earliest Greek religion which, in turn, was indebted to even remoter notions in the Orient. Only by accepting the second claim as a premise was he able to undertake a methodical demonstration of the first. The purpose of that demonstration, moreover, was to shed light, not just on that one third-century vase, but on archaic religion as a whole. Thus the authentication of his reconstruction of archaic religion is entirely non-factual, although undertaken in a methodical manner. In his polemic against pragmatic scholarship he claimed — mistakenly, as Meuli shows — that every detail had a profound hidden meaning. "*Nichts ist sich Selbstzweck, alles Hieroglyphe.*"⁵⁶ It is difficult not to be reminded of Athanasius Kircher and his gallant decipherment of hieroglyphics.⁵⁷ What Bachofen shares with the seventeenth-century Jesuit is unflinching confidence in his own scholarship and the conviction that there is no madness as long as there is method. What Kircher, however, could not have matched is the depth of Bachofen's thoughts and the beauty of his writing.

Bachofen's efforts at deciphering the hieroglyphics of ancient myths also yielded the most extensive, and perhaps least readable, of his books, the *Mutterrecht*, published in 1861.⁵⁸ Its complexity notwithstanding, the *Mutterrecht* was the only one of his works that generated broad and enduring attention after his death. The principal contentions are both lucid and bold. Early on in the evolution of human society, so Bachofen maintained, every tribe or people runs through a development of matrilinear social organization, culminating in matriarchy. Husbands leave their own kin and go to live with the

⁵⁵ Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. VII 36f., 48, 67, 203f., 508f.; cf. III 872, 1088f.

⁵⁶ Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. VII 204.

⁵⁷ See above p. 235.

⁵⁸ Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. II and III, continuing pagination.

family of their wives; children take the name and social status of their mothers; inheritance runs primarily in the female line. After a while the women take command and, indeed, they rule. They rule as heads of families, tribes and states. As Bachofen read his ancient authors and also recent ethnographic works, he found so many diverse traces of matriarchal organization that he concluded that matriarchy was a universal phenomenon. It followed that the developments that led to it and later modified and finally ended it must also be universal.

As Bachofen sees it, the well-ordered matriachal society develops whenever agriculture and matrimony have made their joint appearance. Initially neither of these were present; an earlier state of social organization is marked by promiscuity and community of possessions. It is frequently represented by nomadic herdsmen, and its beginnings are characterized by “generation in the mud (*Schlammzeugung*).” “The wild, natural copulation of the marshes” fascinated Bachofen. In a general way it symbolizes illegitimacy as opposed to the emphasis on legitimate offspring that goes hand in hand with the seeding of fields.⁵⁹ Little by little this primitive communism gives way to hetaerism and a degradation of women that can lead to violent reactions. Eventually hetaerism is restricted to rare and special occasions — a kind of atonement to the deities of the older order — and, finally, it is replaced by the matrimonial dowry. The female talent for organizing families and societies is discovered, and so matriarchy triumphs.⁶⁰ Female nature, as Bachofen sees it, is protean. His theory of the matriarchate notwithstanding, he equates womanhood in Aristotelian fashion with passive fecundity as opposed to the generative and creative faculties of the male.⁶¹ Along with the chaste and orderly instincts of motherhood, he sees, on the one hand, an insatiable desire to breed and, on the other hand, a dark, egotistical greed for domination. The degenerating matriachate finds expression in an exchange of gender roles. Men may be confined to domestic chores, and even cruelly suppressed or exterminated by bellicose Amazons, but in the end the woman warriors themselves succumb to the superior strength of men.⁶² The fall of the matriarchate may be

⁵⁹ Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. II 103f., III 663, 904.

⁶⁰ Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. II 37-40, 120f., 134, III 583.

⁶¹ Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. II 100, 154-56.

⁶² Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. II 138f., 265-68, 287f., 524. The last passage describes the “*Amazonentum*” as a crude preliminary of the matriarchat rather than its degeneration.

due to female violence, just as its beginning was sometimes due to male violence. The excesses brought about by the old order lead to the introduction of the new. The victory of patriarchy, however, need not be abrupt and bloody; it is also seen as the triumph of the intellect over matter, leading to a higher form of legal organization.⁶³

The ascendancy of patriarchal over matriarchal organization presents another necessary development in the progress of society. The nocturnal sphere of female matter must yield to the bright daylight of the male mind; physics gives way to metaphysics, materialism to spiritualism and monotheism. The "uniformly paternal God" of the apostle Paul appears.⁶⁴ An impressive plethora of symbols and mythological figures demonstrates the transition from the matriarchate to the patriarchate. Succeeding to the primeval mud, the former is represented by the female earth and the complementary male water, also by the moon; the latter by the golden sun.⁶⁵ Among the gods of Orient and Occident, Isis and Demeter stand for the maternal, Apollo for the paternal principle. Dionysus, born in the Orient, is the special favourite of women. His cult mirrors diverse aspects of female nature, ranging from chastity to sensuality. He inspires feeling, as opposed to reason, but also pure transcendence. In history he presided over the decay of classical Hellenism and the advent of a new matriarchy, characterized by eroticism, vulgar democracy and constitutional chaos, all of them favoured by the tyrants. At this point Bachofen visibly succumbs to temptation and practises himself what he so sternly reprimanded in Mommsen. The Dionysian decline of classical Antiquity is seen in terms that are influenced by his own jaundiced view of conditions in the age of Napoleon III and Bismarck.⁶⁶ Indeed, the sunlit triumph of the Apollonian patriarchate can never be complete and the dark sway of the mothers will never be wholly crushed. The *Mutterrecht* ends on a note of somber ambivalence. The last sentence refers to Michelet, who is said to advocate "a return to the Isis principle and the natural truth of the

⁶³ Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. II 128f., 134, 205f., 319, III 870f., 978.

⁶⁴ Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. III 926.

⁶⁵ Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. II 88, 161, III 869.

⁶⁶ Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. II 46f., III 583-93. For Bachofen's views on contemporary politics, see Gossman, "Basle, Bachofen and the Critique of Modernity" cit. esp. 164-66, 169. See also *Gesammelte Werke* cit. X, index s.v. Bismarck, Napoleon III.

maternal system (*Mutterrecht*)."⁶⁷ Michelet and Bachofen — what a meeting of two so very different minds. Bachofen, the patrician, the intellectual eccentric, leaves the last word to Michelet, the poor man's son, the advocate of history of and for the people. It is true that Michelet also wrote exquisitely about women and mothers; and Bachofen obviously took note. The dark realm of the mothers is threatening and comforting at the same time. Bachofen feared its corruptive impact on society — and never escaped its lure.

The *Mutterrecht* thus proposes a basic scheme of historical development. As Bachofen gathered more and more evidence, his system became encumbered by transitional and atypical phenomena, so that it is easy to find inconsistencies. One basic assumption, however, that never needed to be modified is the central place of religion in the development of archaic cultures. The noblest legacy of the matriarchal age is the old, Orphic cult of immortality with its concomitant emphasis on tombs and symbolic funeral art.⁶⁸ Since Bachofen's research is spurred by preconceived ideas, all his major works are thematically linked; the *Mutterrecht* presents an imaginative and systematic extension of the themes developed in the *Gräbersymbolik* and the *Unsterblichkeitslehre*. In the final analysis matriarchy is a magnificent historical myth, perhaps the most exciting one created in the nineteenth century. Matriarchy never existed; apart from some isolated voices in the feminist camp, scholarly opinion is now in agreement on this point. In view to the widespread opposition to his interpretation of myths and symbols, Bachofen was at pains to present supporting evidence from the ancient historians. But almost all the ancient texts he adduced do not bear him out. The Amazons of ancient and Renaissance historiography are now taken to be the product of myth and misunderstanding. By no means all of Bachofen's ancient texts were so fanciful as to present Amazons. Some show quite credibly societies, where women commanded high esteem and exercised a measure of control over families and property. But taken together, this does not amount to matriarchy, which is to say, women's domination of society and the state, in contrast to the pattern

⁶⁷ Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. III 927, cf. X 224. The reference is to Michelet's *La Femme* (2.10f.), published little more than a year before the *Mutterrecht*. See Michelet, *Oeuvres complètes* ed. Viallaneix cit. XVIII 9, 530-35.

⁶⁸ Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. II 31, 92-97, III 871, 1106f.

of male domination visible everywhere in the past.⁶⁹ Bachofen's unprecedented gathering of textual and archaeological sources is, nevertheless, an exceptional achievement. His integral approach proved fruitful. A variety of disciplines has benefitted from the way he correlated gender, family, kinship, religion, social activities and political organization. Here a number of his observations and ideas proved influential and have been retained.

Eager as he was to present solid historiographic evidence on specific points, Bachofen knew from the outset that in order to show the universality of matriarchy he would have to rely on myth.⁷⁰ Matriarchy is not historical, but undeniably it existed in the imagination of the Greeks and other nations. How well Bachofen knew to read myths is convincingly demonstrated by his interpretation of Aeschylus' Orestes trilogy. He saw correctly that the difference between the sexes is a central theme of the three plays. It creates the potential for a universal dichotomy, with the older, more elementary female principle eventually losing ground to the male. It is now assumed that Aeschylus also offered his contemporaries in Athens a political message, of which Bachofen could not be aware.⁷¹ Nevertheless, the trilogy does bear out his concept of successive world orders. To Bachofen the maternal organization of society was a reaction to the primitive communism and promiscuity of the earliest tribes. There is, however, no evidence for the existence of that archaic state. If it did not exist, it cannot have prompted the advent of matriarchy. Bachofen's sequence of stages in the evolution of society can no longer be maintained. Modern anthropology recognizes matrilinear as opposed to patrilinear social organization and accepts in some cases that the former gave way to the latter, but denies that matrilinear systems are universal and a precondition for patrilinear ones.⁷² Bachofen's method of interpreting symbols and myths is flawed. As Karl Meuli points out, ancient symbols and myths cannot transmit to us a remembrance of conditions that never existed. Bachofen, the great diviner of veins of history in the ground of ancient

⁶⁹ Uwe Wesel, *Der Mythos vom Matriarchat* (Frankfurt 1980) 36-67, also passim for what follows here.

⁷⁰ Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. II 12.

⁷¹ Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. II 444-48 and passim; cf. III 1165. Uwe Wesel, *Der Mythos vom Matriarchat* (Frankfurt a.M. 1980) 58-62.

⁷² Wesel, *Der Mythos vom Matriarchat* cit. 72f., 77, 81, 99. Karl Meuli in Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. III 1100, 1110-11.

myth, displayed a “sovereign insensitivity” to poetic freedom.⁷³ In fairness it may be said that the notion of poetic fiction was irrelevant to his purpose. That poetic creation, though fictional, owed an authenticity all of its own had always been taken for granted and was not the point of his inquiry. Bachofen was convinced that he could see the past as it had been; he did not need to create it. The authenticity that it possessed did not depend on the ‘true ring’ of poetic language. Nor could it be captured with the pragmatic historian’s banal chase after facts. It was Bachofen’s proud conviction that he had found a scholarly method to authenticate his conclusions which did not require lowly factuality. We shall presently see him explain this in his *Tanaquil*.

Sure of his own method and insensitive to ancient poetry, Bachofen could not possibly be aware of the free play of the imagination that distinguishes his own scholarship. He always wanted his argumentation to be solid, not fanciful. He embarrasses his readers by constantly claiming that his proofs are irrefutable, and he was exasperated by the charges of absurdity that were levelled at him.⁷⁴ Does it follow that he misjudged his talents? In wanting to be a scholar rather than a creative writer, did he fail to fulfil his potential for true greatness?⁷⁵ Only if historical myth is judged to be a lesser achievement. If, however, *fabula* and *historia* are equal partners, often rising to a common peak — and I shall argue in the Conclusion that they are --, then Bachofen becomes a peer to Michelet, Ranke and Burckhardt. Seen in this light, his major works belong to the classics of mid-nineteenth-century historicism. Nobody has stressed more insistently that past ages must be understood ‘from within’ and judged by their own norms and values. Nor was Bachofen the only creator of myth in this category of illustrious historians. Michelet, we have seen it, did likewise and presumably did it with at least a dose of that deliberateness of which Bachofen was so innocent. Even Burckhardt’s *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, published a year ahead of the *Mutterrecht*, was a source of myth, although in this case the agents were the early readers at least as much as the author himself. What is singular about Bachofen, though, is that he mythicized myths rather

⁷³ Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. III 1100.

⁷⁴ A review by a colleague in Zurich qualified Bachofen’s research as “höherer Blödsinn,” a charge that brings the old *furor poeticus* to mind. See Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. III 1071, cf. 1101, VII 202.

⁷⁵ This point is discussed in Gossman, *Orpheus Philologus* cit. 58f.

than historical sources. He mined myths to extract the ore of *historia*, but what he found was *fabula*. So it had happened before him to Euhemerists and Old Testament scholars. Perhaps one might say, however, that they had extracted iron where Bachofen found gold.

With *Die Sage von Tanaquil* Bachofen came a step closer to his elusive goal of dealing comprehensively with all aspects of life in pre-Roman Italy. *Tanaquil* might have been the Etruscan chapter of the great work he could never complete, or certainly a significant part of that chapter. As formerly in the *Unsterblichkeitslehre*, the inquiry is purposely limited to a single topic,⁷⁶ the cycle of fables around Queen Tanaquil. The book achieves at least a partial settlement of accounts with Bachofen's old foe, the critical school of Roman history. He hoped that the mass of evidence he was presenting would settle a central issue in his feud with Niebuhr and Mommsen. It does; Bachofen wins. Even today the origin of the Etruscans is subject to controversy. Niebuhr developed a theory which had them descend from the Rhaetian Alps, and this was cautiously endorsed by Mommsen. Analogously Mommsen dismissed Herodotus' account that they were Asians and had come to Italy from Lydia, the region in which Troy was located. He made light of Herodotus' statement and "all the pile of crude historical speculations that has been reared upon it."⁷⁷ Bachofen was convinced of the Lydian theory and, beginning with the *Geschichte der Römer*, had steadily added to Mommsen's "pile of speculations." *Tanaquil* is his most important contribution; like most of his books it never received broad attention, but today the Lydian theory is supported by many scholars, though many also disagree. Niebuhr, by contrast, no longer has any followers.

Tanaquil is linked to the *Mutterrecht*. The central contention is that the Etruscans, migrating to Italy from Asia Minor, brought with them remnants of a matriarchal organization. Since Roman society was stolidly patriarchal, a clash was unavoidable, as the different mentalities led to political and military conflicts. We cannot follow Bachofen's detailed discussion of the multi-layered Tanaquil tradition.

⁷⁶ Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. VI 11; cf VII 8f.

⁷⁷ Theodor Mommsen, *Römische Geschichte* 1.9. I am quoting the English transl. by W. P. Dickson, revised ed. (London 1908) I 155. For the Etruscan controversy, see *Der Kleine Pauly*, ed. Ziegler cit. s.v. Etrusker and *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. N.G.L. Hammond and H.H. Scullard, s.v. Etruscans and Tanaquil. According to the latter, Tanaquil "may well be a historical character." Bachofen thought otherwise.

The basic points derived from the accounts of Roman historians are these: an Etruscan woman from Tarquinii, Tanaquil is connected with the last three of the legendary kings of Rome. The first was her husband; she persuaded him to move from Tarquinii to Rome, where he became king and was known as Tarquinius Priscus. After he had been murdered Tanaquil saw to it that her son-in-law, Servius Tullius, succeeded to the throne. While she is only given a marginal role in the horrific events that led to Servius' murder, his successor, Tarquinius Superbus, the last king of Rome, is said to be either her son or her grandson. Bachofen saw in Tanaquil a reflection of an archaic oriental concept of a kingmaker goddess. The tradition of a female power-broker was important evidence for his theory of matriarchy. Various oriental myths transformed the goddess into a mortal woman; initially her powers were always based on sexual enticement. Once the Etruscans had brought this tradition to Italy, it was modified by two factors. One was the political struggle which ended with Rome's ascendance over the Etruscans. "The incredible fury with which Rome destroyed Etruria and stamped out all traces of her customary ways," says Bachofen, "did still not succeed in depriving us of every monument of that kind."⁷⁸ Thus the myth lived on, but for the benefit of post-war generations its racial edge was blunted. Tanaquil was made to create a friendly bond between the Etruscan king Tarquinius Priscus and his Roman successor, Servius Tullius, whereas factual history, Bachofen believed, recorded their antagonism. The second modification was of the moral order. "The Roman tradition accepted without change the idea that the supreme power was the gift of women, but it deprived Tanaquil of all those features which the Orient had bestowed upon its throne-granting women."⁷⁹ Thus the Asian harlot was turned into a venerable matron Roman-style.

The character of the Etruscan religion was "humanized" in the person of Tanaquil and subsequently even "historicized." Those who remodelled Tanaquil "at the expense of historical truth" were none other than Rome's great historians, in particular Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus. They "translated religious concepts into historical events" and were thus responsible for "the critical attempts, by which a later age engaged to reform the traditional religious myth according to the requirements of rationalist (*verständlich*) historical pragmatism."

⁷⁸ Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. VI 9 and for the following 303.

⁷⁹ Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. VI 12.

But, as Bachofen sadly concludes, "all this reasoning (*Verstand*), with which the critics attempted to outdo each other, could not compensate for the destruction of the archetype (*Urbild*)."⁸⁰ Unmistakably, Bachofen here tars the ancient historians with the brush he normally reserved for his sworn enemy, the modern school of pragmatic historians. Does he still "believe that Livy ... and Dionysius knew a good deal more ... about their people than did Niebuhr?" Of course, he does; but this passage shows to what degree he ultimately looked to myths rather than historical texts for the vital truth about past ages.

Etruscan culture is no longer seen to have a particularly matriarchal orientation, but Bachofen's reconstruction of the Tanaquil tradition is, despite errors in detail, convincing and the ramifications which he uncovers throughout the ancient world are impressive. For our purposes, however, the special significance of *Tanaquil* lies elsewhere. In no other book did he try so hard to analyse the non-factual authenticity inherent in symbols and myths that will justify their use in historical scholarship. What causes pragmatic historians to ignore the Tanaquil tradition and other mythical material is their

eternally hopeless elicitation of historical truth ... But by denying its historicity, the myth is not deprived of all significance. What cannot have happened, can anyway be thought. The outer truth is replaced by an inner one.⁸¹

At this point it was imperative for Bachofen to define his method of establishing that inner truth to be gained from mythistory. This he attempted to do in a lengthy section at the end of his introduction. Rambling and in part bitterly polemical, it may perhaps be summarized like this.

The past, Bachofen claims, is unfolding organically and places the investigator in a situation comparable to that of the natural scientist who likewise must draw solid information from life that is in flux. Investigation of the past, then, requires a method which is truly objective. Bachofen attempts to propose such a method and insists that it is very different from that of pragmatic historians. With regard to the succession of Tarquinius Priscus or Servius Tullius, for instance, the pragmatists might ask: "how in reality did everything come to pass?" and not find an answer that could satisfy their critical rules.

⁸⁰ Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. VI 302f., 310.

⁸¹ Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. VI 10.

They must thus deny historicity. Now it would serve no purpose to counter historicity denied simply with historicity asserted, or with mere hypotheses about a probable course of events. To question the probability and logic of the events narrated in a text is strictly unscientific, since lack of probability and logical fallacies do not contradict the authenticity of the text. The objective researcher rejects “the false assumption that the central issue in the investigation of the past is the elicitation of factual rather than essential truth.” Since every tradition is a “self-contained intellectual organism,” the correct procedure is to study it “according to the law that governed its genesis.” In short, true objectivity can only mean this: to persevere with a painstaking study of the evidence, until the genetic law (*Bildungsgesetz*) is laid bare. Furthermore, since nothing is static or occurs in isolation, each phenomenon must be related to its precedents and sequels; specifics cannot be successfully investigated without a grasp of the whole.⁸²

The most noticeable aspect of Bachofen’s programmatic pronouncement is the emphasis on organic growth and evolution. It points to the anthropological slant of his research in the last two decades of his life and also to his major contributions to the development of ethnology.⁸³ On the other hand, he fails to present a model for the authentication of non-factual data, with which to confront the pragmatic historians. In so far as his method implies the goal of historicism, they were in full agreement with him. On the other hand, the truth Bachofen termed “essential,” in the absence of factual proof, remains hypothetical and therefore subjective. That his argumentation was objective was Bachofen’s great illusion. Perhaps it comes as a relief to find that non-factual authenticity can be postulated but not rationally analysed. Ultimately *fabula* will always defy reason.

⁸² Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. VI 49-54.

⁸³ Bachofen did apparently not read Darwin, who was, nevertheless, a very close contemporary. For the significance of organic development and evolution in Bachofen’s work, see Karl Meuli and Johannes Dörmann in Bachofen, *Gesammelte Werke* cit. III 1105f. and VIII 532-37.

IV

The Last Defenders of the Historicity of Genesis

Bachofen was exceptional. Profound respect for the archaic traditions handed down by the Roman historians of the classical period had guided him on his path to original and imaginative work. If we turn to those of Bachofen's contemporaries who still defended the Trojan War and Genesis traditions, it would seem impossible to discover a comparable achievement. In his *Fasti Hellenici*, three huge volume of analytical chronology published and reprinted between 1824 and 1851, Henry Fynes Clinton found Hercules to be "a real person, ... authenticated by the testimonies in the Iliad and Odyssey." Likewise, the existence of Theseus and other heroes was clearly established by the early poets. Clinton also lavished eighteen pages on an exhaustive discussion of the dates of the Trojan War.⁸⁴ His exacting scholarship notwithstanding, Clinton's trust in mythistory enraged the not so gullible ones among his peers. In 1843 George Grote attested Clinton's *Fasti* "a well-earned authority," only to make fun of his treating Aeolus, the Homeric god of the winds in Euhemerist fashion "as a man of flesh and blood, belonging to some given year before the Christian era." Grote also quoted the rules Clinton had set for himself:

We may acknowledge as real persons all those whom there is no reason for rejecting. The presumption is in favour of the early tradition, if no argument can be brought to overthrow it.

This is exactly the position Perizonius had argued well over a hundred years earlier. One can appreciate the directness of Grote's protest:

Mr. Clinton not only lightens his own shoulders of all the burden of proving, but also casts upon those of his adversary a burden of disproving, altogether intolerable and unheard of.⁸⁵

The battle over Genesis deserves a somewhat fuller discussion, although the ancient historians of Bachofen's generation who were

⁸⁴ Henry Fynes Clinton, *Fasti Hellenici. The Civil and Literary Chronology of Greece from the Earliest Accounts to the LVth Olympiad* (Oxford 1824-51, repr. 1970) I vi-ix, 123-40

⁸⁵ Grote, "Grecian Legends and Early History" cit. 78, 107, 123.

willing to stand up for Moses were hardly breaking new ground. What they did achieve, however, was continued wide acceptance of the Mosaic time-frame for ancient history. In a way, that too is remarkable in view of the many authors who had for some time attempted to popularize more realistic estimates. To mention just one such popularizer, in 1828 Philipp Buttmann, the deserving secretary of the Berlin Academy, published a collection of papers he had written from the beginning of the century, several of which dealt with Genesis. They show what Buttmann took for granted. Proper names occurring in the first chapters of Genesis might prompt new geographical and etymological investigations concerning the origin of its splendid tales, but that these tales were all myths was no longer open to question. "Obviously, today no one will be looking there for historical data," Buttmann said with regard to the accounts of the Creation and the Fall.⁸⁶ Turning to the Deluge, he suggested that the known versions of the myth had all sprung from a common archetype that had not yet contained specific indications of time. Attempts to impose a chronology of the events narrated in an archaic tale were always a sign of later editing.⁸⁷

The mythical nature of Genesis, then, was a foregone conclusion — at least for anyone who, like Buttmann, kept abreast with the work of German Old-Testament scholars and accepted their findings. Most of Buttmann's contemporaries, however, did not do that; nor did public opinion much change throughout the middle decades of the century. We had earlier referred to the 1845-46 edition of Dom Calmet's Bible dictionary, a manual that was translated into several languages and was circulated widely.⁸⁸ The editors retained both the reality of the Flood and the biblical time-frame. Another instructive example is Sir George Rawlinson (1812-1902), an Oxford don and protégé of Gladstone, who was just three years older than Bachofen. Invited to give the Bampton lectures for 1859, Rawlinson chose as his topic: *The Historical Evidences of the Truth of the Scripture Records Stated Anew*. He admitted that myth had won a place in secular

⁸⁶ Buttmann, *Mythologus* cit. I 122, quoting a paper first published in 1804.

⁸⁷ Buttmann, *Mythologus* cit. I 182-84, 188, 190, referring to a paper read to the Academy in 1812. Cf. Genesis 8.3, 11. The lovely detail of the dove returning with a fresh olive leaf was part of the original myth, the fussy chronology of events was not. The "naïve poet" who invented the olive leaf, Buttmann argued, would never have claimed that the earth had previously been covered with water "for three quarters of a year."

⁸⁸ See above p. 260 and Calmet's biography in the *Dictionnaire de biographie française* (Paris 1933 —).

history. Not so long ago, Caesar and Romulus, Alexander and Semiramis had all been accepted as factual on equal terms.

We can most of us remember when in this country the story of regal Rome, and even the legend of the Trojan settlement in Latium, were seriously placed before boys as history... . But all of this is now changed.

It was a different matter with sacred history. There “we find a scheme of doctrine which is bound up with facts, ... which is null and void without them.” And Moses’ “facts” could be accepted with confidence. Most probably he had access to written documents. In any event, Moses

might, by mere oral tradition, have obtained the history of Abraham, and even the Deluge, at third hand; and that of the Temptation and the Fall, at fifth hand.⁸⁹

Surely, traditions handed down so directly were reliable.

When Rawlinson lectured like this in 1859 he showed no awareness of the excitement then reigning in scientific circles. To natural historians, geologists and anthropologists 1859 was an *annus mirabilis*. Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* appeared. In Abbeville on the Somme and in Devonshire the existence of human artifacts and relics of long extinct animals in the same geological strata was undisputably confirmed. Leading British scientists accepted the geological age of man in papers read before their confrères. Even the great Sir Charles Lyell, who had so far maintained man’s recent appearance, announced publicly his conversion.⁹⁰ Rawlinson attached no significance to these developments, although he was not entirely unaware of them.⁹¹ The threats, as he perceived them, to a sound view of ancient history based on the Mosaic chronology came from Germany. The scholars whose views needed to be challenged were the biblical mythologists from Eichhorn to Strauss and, moreover, the champions of critical history like Christian Karl Bunsen and, on occasion, even the admired Niebuhr. Ancient history to Rawlinson

⁸⁹ Rawlinson, *The Historical Evidences* cit. 2-5, 49-51.

⁹⁰ Glyn Daniel and Colin Renfrew, *The Idea of Prehistory* (Edinburgh 1988) 34ff. Donald K. Grayson, *The Establishment of Human Antiquity* (New York 1983) xi, 168ff., 208f. Haber, *The Age of the World* cit. 275-90.

⁹¹ Rawlinson, *The Historical Evidences* cit. 74f., 363f.

meant the study of texts and nothing else. In this regard he followed the illustrious example that his protector, William Ewart Gladstone, had set in 1858 with his volume of *Studies on Homer and the Homeric Age*.⁹²

Twelve years later, in 1871, Rawlinson returned to the fray with a lecture on *The Alleged Historical Difficulties of the Old and New Testaments*. He was no longer quite so sure of the chronological clues provided by Genesis. Sceptics should bear in mind, however, that the Septuagint and the Samaritans added at least a thousand years to the period from the Deluge to Abraham, as calculated on the basis of the Hebrew text. That might just be enough to accommodate the secular records of Babylon and Egypt within the biblical frame. Besides, the numbers stated in Genesis might be distorted as a result of textual corruption. But some calculations were possible, nevertheless. The Israelites had lived in Egypt for 430 years and, with Malthus' theory in mind, it was not difficult to assume that during this time they had increased from five thousand to two millions. Thus Rawlinson — he was now Camden Professor of Ancient History — bravely stood his ground against more critical-minded fellow historians and Bible scholars.⁹³ It is true that he had modified his earlier position in one significant respect, but the impulse to do so no longer came from historical scholars. In 1871 he refused to be drawn into any discussion of what he now termed “pre-historic” events, like the Creation and the Flood. These were located “at the outskirts of the historical field, on the debatable ground between Science and History,” and as a professional historian Rawlinson felt justified in keeping aloof. In the year in which Darwin's *Descent of Man* appeared, “debatable ground” certainly existed, but the debates were no longer as heated as they had been twenty years earlier. Moreover, throughout this period, the ones to join battle were not the historians, but rather the scientists among themselves and also some men of the cloth. Rawlinson too, of course, was ordained, and he was always rather slow to react. At any rate, he was fully representative of the historical profession when he refused to be drawn into a controversy with the scientists. Apart from that, his conservatism had then become untypical, at least among historical scholars. Despite his coyness about the earliest times, he clearly

⁹² Daniel and Renfrew, *The Idea of Prehistory* cit. 46.

⁹³ George Rawlinson, *The Alleged Historical Difficulties of the Old and New Testaments. A Lecture* (London 1871). I used a reprint in *Modern Scepticism. A Course of Lectures* by several authors, 3rd ed. (London 1871) 265-303, esp. 267-71, 278.

continued to accept that the highly-developed civilizations of Egypt and Babylon in the middle of the third millennium fell half-way between the Creation and Christ. Seemingly untroubled by all the fuss about evolution, he would perhaps not have been greatly puzzled by Athanasius Kircher's Adam, who was created reading and writing Hebrew.⁹⁴ Adam he understood; stone age man he did not.

Afterwards, Rawlinson saw little need for further concessions to the critical school of thought. He had been appointed canon of Canterbury and, in 1888, he retired from his Oxford chair to a rich ecclesiastical living.⁹⁵ In addition to his amply commented translation of Herodotus and substantial volumes on the Ancient Near East, he published in 1887 an *Ancient History* designed to serve a wider public.⁹⁶ In his bibliographical introduction he paid a compliment to Niebuhr, whom he had criticized in 1859, but did not mention Mommsen. Nor did he mention Mycene, which a decade earlier had been the site of Schliemann's excavations. It is true that Rawlinson cut out Troy, that he said the first three kings of Rome, unlike their successors, were "personifications rather than personages" and that he stuck to the exodus from Egypt as the starting point of Jewish history. But whether he was finally prepared to abandon the Mosaic time-frame must remain doubtful. He gave Bossuet a place of honour in his list of recommended universal histories and listed Scaliger's *De emendatione temporum* among the relevant works on chronology. He also indicated some books that would help the reader to understand "anthropology, ... the basis on which history rests." The list ends with John Lubbock's *Pre-historic Times* (1865), the first great popularization of the new scientific findings with regard to prehistoric man. Rawlinson's reference to it, however, is curiously garbled and contemptuous.⁹⁷ Preceding the reference to Lubbock, Rawlinson warmly recommended James Cowles Prichard's *Researches into the*

⁹⁴ See above p. 244.

⁹⁵ See his biography in *Dictionary of National Biography* (London 1885 —), Supplement 1901-1910.

⁹⁶ George Rawlinson, *Ancient History*, revised ed. (New York 1899). This edition, part of a series entitled "The World's Great Classics," with its prefaces and illustrations is in itself a testimony to Rawlinson's continued popularity.

⁹⁷ Rawlinson, *Ancient History* cit. 2: " 'Prehistoric Man' [!], by Sir John Lubbock, London, 1866. This book is based mainly on recent researches into the earliest vestiges of man upon earth, as those believed to have been found underneath the floors of caves, in ancient gravel deposits, in the soil at the bottom of lakes, in the so-called 'kitchen-middings,' and the like. It is well illustrated."

Physical History of Mankind, “3rd edition, 1836.” This work may be an accurate reflection of his own quandaries. It was not until the fifth and last volume of that third edition, published in 1847, that Prichard revised the conservative stance he had taken throughout the earlier parts of the work. In a “Note on the Biblical Chronology,” appended to that last volume, he admitted for the first time that mankind could not have developed rapidly enough to meet the time-frame of Genesis. But Prichard’s conversion was half-hearted. “We can never know,” he concluded, “how many centuries or even chiliads of years may have elapsed since the first man of clay received the image of God and the breath of life.” And he added: “the whole duration of time from the beginning must apparently have been within moderate bounds.”⁹⁸ Prichard’s ambiguity was matched by Rawlinson’s own. The first of Rawlinson’s recommended readings in anthropology was

‘The Book of Genesis’ — the only extant work which claims to give an authoritative account of the creation and dispersion of mankind, and which is universally admitted to contain most interesting notices of the primitive condition of the human race, and of important facts belonging to very remote times.⁹⁹

Rawlinson could permit himself to be ambiguous. Historians no longer needed to discuss *fabula*’s place in what was now called ‘prehistory.’ The notion of indefinite mythological time had taken care of the mind-boggling sequences of dynasties claimed by Manetho, Berossus and Herodotus’ Egyptian priests. Ancient historians could begin their factual accounts with the third millennium B.C. and thus avoid taking sides in the clash between Mosaic chronology on the one hand and the calculations of geologists and anthropologists on the other.

Although by the mid-nineteenth century most historians had withdrawn from the fray, even some men of science continued to think like Rawlinson. An elaborate rational defence of the Mosaic time-frame, founded upon the inspired character of Scripture, could still be undertaken. But the example of the marine zoologist Philip Henry Gosse (1810-88) suggests that to do so required not only imagination, but also eccentricity. In his *Omphalos*, published in 1857, Gosse took up a line of argument earlier presented by Chateaubriand and

⁹⁸ So quoted in Grayson, *The Establishment of Human Antiquity* cit. 156f.

⁹⁹ Rawlinson, *Ancient History* cit. 1f.; cf. 28f., 54f. for other passages that suggest the compatibility of ancient “monuments” with the Mosaic chronology.

developed it with considerable ingenuity. Just as God had fitted Adam with a navel, that in Adam's unique case, was not needed, the Almighty could have created the world, complete with fossils and all the marks of a geological age that, in fact, had not come to pass. All life was moving in cycles, and there was no way of telling at what point of the gigantic earth cycle the Creation had taken place. If it occurred in an advanced stage of that cycle, the new scientific discoveries would not contradict Genesis; rather the relics of earlier aeons would all be part of the Mosaic Creation.¹⁰⁰ Inevitably, more problems and more debates were generated by the new discoveries of the men of science, but to pursue these debates would mean to ignore the limits set to an investigation concerned with historical thought.

V

Historical Subjects in Nineteenth-Century Art

A work of art can treat a historical subject. Artists can use their professional modes of expression — painting, sculpture, and so on — to deal with a specific event or a situation typical of some point in the past. Whether or not they do it intentionally, they can create historical documents — records either of events that had occurred long ago or of events in the immediate past, as witnessed by the artist. Every portrait, for instance, is a historical record. In fact, recording represents one of the basic impulses for artistic creation, and works of art that constitute historical documents can be found in every period. Roman portrait busts or the Bayeux tapestry may remind us of the singular expressiveness of such productions, and also of their variety in terms of concepts and media. To deal with this form of art in the context of *historia* and *fabula* is appealing, because it presents some unique aspects of the relationship between historical fact and fiction. To focus specifically on the nineteenth century is appropriate in view of the unprecedented favour then enjoyed by paintings and monuments commemorating historical events. When the demand for

¹⁰⁰ Haber, *The Age of the World* cit. 246-50. James R. Moore, "Charles Lyell and the Noachian Deluge" in *The Flood Myth* ed. Dundes cit. 405-25, esp. 417f.

colourful historical narratives was seemingly insatiable, visual chronicling could not lag behind. Since the Renaissance, at any rate, many artists and writers had sought one another's company, and in the nineteenth century growing demand for richly illustrated books afforded new opportunities for their collaboration. The popularity of history and historical fiction, in particular, invited writers and artists to join forces.¹⁰¹ But while the writers continued to puzzle over the respective merits of factuality, invention and rhetorical effect, as they had done since Antiquity, the artists found themselves tackling problems for which there was far less precedent. In the heyday of historicism the treatment of historical subjects in art invited a good deal of reflection and comment.

The term 'history painting (*peinture d'histoire*, *Historienmalerei*)' has a long tradition. The art historian André Félibien (1619-95) is credited with a ranking-system for painterly skills that was taken up in academies and encyclopedias and thus obtained standard validity. According to Félibien, historical subjects offered the greatest challenge to painters and thus were owed pre-eminence over portraiture, genre, landscape and still-life.¹⁰² Enduring confusion reigns with regard to the subjects covered by the term 'history painting.' Before the nineteenth century it tended to be used — quite properly in view of the original meaning of the term 'history' — for any picture that reflected the artist's acquaintance with a story. This means that if the picture was to be understood, the viewer, too, needed to have some knowledge of the narrative in question. Therefore stories from the Bible or from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and scenes from Homer, Plutarch, Dante, and Shakespeare would be among the history painter's favourite choices. For the purposes of this study, and generally in the context of the nineteenth century, a more restrictive definition is required. We need to be concerned only with pictorial and sculptural representations of events and personalities based on

¹⁰¹ Peter Paret, *Art as History. Episodes in the Culture and Politics of Nineteenth-Century Germany*, Princeton, N.J. 1988.

¹⁰² Eugenio Battisti in *Encyclopedia of World Art* cit. VII 491. Jutta Ziesener-Eigel, *Das Historienbild des 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhunderts in Frankreich. Zur Entwicklung eines neueren Geschichtsverständnisses in der Kunst* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Philosophical Faculty, University of Cologne 1982) 19f. In general, see Robert Rosenblum and H.W. Janson, *19th-Century Art* (New York 1984) 19, 264-69 and passim. For developments prior to the nineteenth century, see Werner Hager, *Das geschichtliche Ereignisbild. Beitrag zu einer Typologie des weltlichen Geschichtsbildes bis zur Aufklärung* (Munich 1939). The superiority of history painting is also emphasized in the *Schilderboek* of Karel van Mander (1548-1606).

autopsy or on texts within the range of the historical discipline, used perhaps in combination with visual aids like photographs. This will include public monuments commemorating historical facts, provided they exhibit human figures. Restricting the discussion to properly historical material does not, of course, exclude openings for *fabula*. Artists may cast their nets widely and mix fact and fiction either by choice or, as we shall see, in many cases by necessity.

History painting is by definition realistic. In the case of England, Roy Strong has emphasized that the popularity of the historical novel, due to such major writers as Walter Scott, went hand in hand with high expectations of accuracy. These were reflected in the illustrations that publishers commissioned for their historical titles but also came to bear on British history painting in general.¹⁰³ In paintings and sculptures, however, such realism creates its own momentum capable of blurring the contrast between *historia* and *fabula*. Eugène Delacroix's famous *Liberté* leading the Paris citizens on to the barricades of the July Revolution is a good example. Here, as in many other cases, an allegory is mingling so realistically with genuine human characters that the viewer is encouraged to attribute to both the same degree of reality.¹⁰⁴ Also, if history is to be seen rather than read, special requirements will apply that do not exist for narrative sources. One is the unity of time and place. The painter of a historical event can only depict what happened at a given place in a given moment. A sense of unfolding development must be achieved through special techniques; a facial expression or gesture, for instance, might reflect the impact of what had happened just before the point in time frozen in the picture, or an anticipation of what will inevitably follow upon that point. History painters might use descriptive titles or even captions, but in large measure the effect of their work would still depend on the viewer's acquaintance with the story to be related. From the early decades of the nineteenth century they could count on a knowledgeable public, well served by a plethora of fine and readable national and universal histories. It is noticeable, nevertheless, that a limited number of specific historical scenes was being preferred and got repeated and varied almost ad infinitum. In this respect history painting followed the solid tradition established earlier in the treatment

¹⁰³ Roy Strong, *And when did you last see your father? The Victorian Painter and British History* (London 1978) 30-32 and *passim*.

¹⁰⁴ For this aspect see Heinz-Toni Wappenschmidt, *Allegorie, Symbol und Historienbild im späten 19. Jahrhundert* (Munich 1984).

of biblical and mythological subjects. Even so, as will soon be shown in some specific cases, the high standards of historical knowledge challenged the artist to prepare for his work with exacting and time-consuming research. It is true that much of this was dedicated to the mastery of period costume and decor. Genre had an advantage over specific historical scenes in that knowledge of the typical, once gained, could serve many times, whereas some components of unique events, for instance the likenesses of participants, had to be researched afresh for each subject.¹⁰⁵

The special requirements of history painting are highly significant for the relationship between *historia* and *fabula*. An author can deal with Napoleon's strategic dispositions in this or that battle without mentioning the kind of uniform he wore or horse he rode. The history painter, however, if he has no record of these details, has little choice but to resort to a more or less informed guess. Of course, historiographers too must constantly make assumptions as they create a coherent narrative, but at least they can indicate what is recorded fact and what is inference on their part. Indeed, they are required to say so by the standards of their profession. Artists cannot easily make this distinction; once painted, the surmised uniform will look as factual as Napoleon's face. When an author can state that Napoleon placed himself on one of the small hills overlooking the battlefield, the painter must choose the actual hill and has no means to express uncertainty about his choice. Another aspect of the same dilemma is well illustrated in Albrecht Altdorfer's masterpiece, completed in 1529, depicting the Battle of Issus between Alexander the Great and Darius (333 B.C.). The action is at its climax, with Darius turning to flee and throngs of horsemen and seemingly countless foot soldiers weaving through the foreground of the picture. Now Alexander's ancient biographers had indicated some precise figures of troops and casualties, but the only way the painter could acknowledge the presumed accuracy of the historians' data on losses suffered was by copying them on to some of the banners carried by the two sides.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Strong, *And when did you last see your father?* cit. 32ff., 47ff. Werner Hager, "Vier Historienbilder" in *Beiträge zum Problem des Stilpluralismus* ed. W. Hager and N. Knopp (Munich 1977) 134-40.

¹⁰⁶ Quintus Curtius Rufus 3.9.1-6, 11.27. Arrian, *Anabasis Alexandri* 2.8-11. Gisela Goldberg, *Die Alexanderschlacht und die Historienbilder Wilhelms IV. und seiner Gemahlin Jacobaea für die Münchner Residenz* (Munich 1983) 7-14. Koselleck, *Histories Past* cit., 3f., discusses the historical implications of the picture. The central panel in Altdorfer's picture, which lists discrepant numbers, is not original.

These numbers then would inform the viewer of the magnitude of Alexander's victory, which was to follow the scene depicted in the painting. Understandably, Altdorfer's solution did not invite imitation.

Beginning with Hesiod's Muses, *historia* and *fabula* had often been mixed up because the will to separate them was lacking. In this case, even at the height of historical criticism in the nineteenth century, we may find them mixed up because it was technically impossible to distinguish them. It is true that painters were not unduly vexed by this problem. Standard requirements of historical accuracy were in force since the eighteenth century and were observed with ever growing studiousness. Likeness of face and body had to be rendered when it could be reliably established, as was usually possible with prominent figures of the more recent past. Nothing of the kind could be expected with regard to their humble attendants. Background architecture and landscape were treated in analogous fashion. Often extraordinary care was lavished on the realistic rendering of everything the viewers might recognize.¹⁰⁷ The public could normally be trusted to know where fidelity to fact was to be expected and where not. The rules were perfectly reasonable; nothing more could be demanded of an artist committed to serving Clio faithfully. Yet, just the faithful observance of these rules would further obscure the division line between *historia* and *fabula*. The expectations raised by the existence of standard rules of accuracy discouraged both the artist and the public from undertaking a critical examination of factuality. The point is that the rules will not change whether the depicted scene is factual or fictional, whether the painter illustrates an episode of Joan of Arc's life in light of the authentic trial records¹⁰⁸ or an imaginary scene from Schiller's play about her. The rules stood firm, whether Francis I of France was depicted showing the royal tombs at Saint-Denis to the visiting Emperor Charles V, or holding at Cloux the dying Leonardo da Vinci in his arms. The first scene represented an event that occurred in the course of Charles V's visit to Saint-Denis, 7-8 January

¹⁰⁷ Ziesener-Eigel, *Das Historienbild .. in Frankreich* cit. 123 and passim. Robert Rosenblum, *Transformations in Late Eighteenth Century Art* (Princeton 1967) 34-37 and passim. Edgar Wind, "The Revolution of History Painting" *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 2 (1938-39) 116-27.

¹⁰⁸ Such was the intention of Lionel Royer (1852-1926), the creator of the huge cycle of frescos in the Basilique du Bois-Chenu above Domrémy.

1540.¹⁰⁹ The second scene is pure fiction. Francis I was not in Cloux on 2 May 1519 when Leonardo died there. The legend, melodramatically reported by Vasari, became a fashionable subject for painters and was treated with due respect for portraiture and period decor.¹¹⁰

Meeting the general expectations for historical accuracy provided artists with a magic wand, as it were. The viewers who recognized Leonardo and the king were subtly tricked into assuming that other details in the picture were equally truthful and blaming it on their own ignorance when they did not recognize them. It is true that their professional powers of deception notwithstanding, some artists developed a commitment to historical accuracy, which is truly extraordinary. Throughout the years 1782-95 John Singleton Copley (1737-1815) kept patiently gathering evidence that was to serve him for a single painting. The scene represented Charles I of England, on 4 January 1642 paying a personal visit to the House of Commons. He did so to demand that parliamentary immunity be lifted and five impeached members of the House be handed over to stand trial. It was the beginning of the civil war. Copley did not rest until he had found contemporary portraits of all fifty-eight persons figuring on his canvas. But even then he could not avoid the conundrum of history art. Many of his models would not show how the sitters had looked in 1642, and he had to resort to his imagination as he undertook to rejuvenate or age them, as required.¹¹¹

For a long time painters of scenes of the past had knowingly exercised a choice. They could opt for a fitting historical frame and transport their viewers into an unaccustomed world that might appeal to them through its strangeness. Or they could challenge the public by staging remote occurrences in a familiar setting. Renaissance painters

¹⁰⁹ For Antoine-Jean Gros' canvas of this scene (1812), see Manfred Heinrich Brunner, *Antoine-Jean Gros. Die napoleonischen Historienbilder* (Ph. D. dissertation, Philosophical Faculty, University of Bonn 1979) 229, 323f. Charles V's father, Philip the Fair, had been shown the royal tombs on 24 November 1501; for both visits see *Collection des voyages des souverains des Pays-Bas*, ed. Louis-Prosper Gachard (Brussels 1874-82) I 131, II 158.

¹¹⁰ See, among other renderings, especially that of François Ménageot (1781), with Francis I borrowed from Titian's portrait now in the Louvre. In the background one sees the Borghese 'Gladiator' (signed by Agasias of Ephesus). This statue is also in the Louvre and at the time may very well have been thought to come from the collections of Francis I: Rosenblum, *Transformations* cit 35f.; Francis Haskell, "The Old Masters in Nineteenth-Century French Painting" *The Art Quarterly* 34 (1971) 55-85, esp. 57-59. Cf. R.J. Knecht, *Francis I* (Cambridge 1982) 264.

¹¹¹ Strong, *And when did you last see your father?* cit. 28f.

had known of the rule that attire and furnishings ought to conform to the period and location of the represented subject or, at least, drive home the outlandishness of the scene, such as when biblical characters were presented in contemporary oriental costume. Sophisticated artists and art lovers, however, had also looked for different and less commonsense effects. In 1557 Dürer was criticized by Ludovico Dolce for the Germanic appearance of his Holy Virgins and scenes from the Bible. Goethe, on the other hand, commended Leonardo and Rembrandt for the liberty they sometimes took in discarding "uncertain and antiquated costume."¹¹² By the end of the eighteenth century reliable information on authentic period costume and furniture began to be readily available.¹¹³ In 1771 Benjamin West (1738-1820), future president of the London Royal Academy of Arts, painted the death of General James Wolfe in action against the French at Quebec City, on 13 September 1759. West was commemorating a hero at a time when heroism, a rare and precious thing, called for treatment in grand style with classicizing robes. None other than Sir Joshua Reynolds warned West not to flout the academic rule. But West insisted on showing Wolfe in his regular uniform. He also refused to sacrifice the actual location to a more classical locus and characterized the Canadian environment by juxtaposing a nearly naked Indian to the dying general. He is said to have justified his procedure like this:

The event to be commemorated happened in the year 1759, in a region of the world unknown to the Greeks and Romans, and at a period of time when no warriors who wore such [classical] costume existed. The subject I have to represent is a great battle fought and won, and the same truth which gives law to the historian should rule the painter.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Reiner Hausscherr, *Convenevolezza. Historische Angemessenheit in der Darstellung von Kostüm und Schauplatz seit der Spätantike bis zum 16. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden 1984) 7f., 13f., 45f.

¹¹³ The first scholarly treatment of the matter is said to be: Jacob Heinrich von Hefner-Alteneck, *Trachten des christlichen Mittelalters nach gleichzeitigen Kunstdenkmälern* (Frankfurt-Darmstadt 1840-54).

¹¹⁴ Wind, "The Revolution of History Painting" cit. 116. Strong, *And when did you last see your father?* cit. 24-26. West later painted repeatedly Admiral Nelson, dying or dead, showing him either in uniform or in accordance with the traditional idea of decorum: Grose Evans, *Benjamin West and the Taste of His Times* (Carbondale, Ill. 1959) plates 5, 64-67.

With his appeal to the law of historical truth, West insisted that events ought to be shown and seen the way they had actually happened. That was very well but would not necessarily serve another task that had been assigned to Clio since Antiquity, namely to proffer examples worthy of imitation. Just when historicism was increasingly prepared to reject that task in the interest of historical truth, history painting tended to perpetuate the tenet of *historia vitae magistra*.¹¹⁵ And again, the rule of observing historical accuracy as far as it was, painterly speaking, possible would serve to gloss over conflicting demands of fact-finding and model-setting art. History painting permitted the artist to express deeply-held personal convictions. It also offered plenty of scope for highly effective propaganda.

While West and Copley were talented artists, Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825) was a genius. It was indeed a sign of his superior originality that he could not tackle the task of painting a historical record without experiencing a conflict between factual reality and his idea of the event. In the autumn of 1790 David was commissioned to commemorate the famous oath taken by the revolutionary National Assembly on 20 June 1789 in the Tennis Court of the Versailles palace. David's own statements, and also the exhausting research historians have devoted to this project, permit us to see how the painter conceived his task to create a historical monument. In preparation for his undertaking, he used the newspapers to launch an appeal to all deputies, present at the meeting of 20 June, whom he had not yet had an opportunity to sketch. He invited them to send him engraved portraits or, even better, to visit him in his studio. Even then, however, he can hardly have felt bound to respect the results of his appeal. He envisaged a canvas of immense proportions. A number of sketches and detail studies have been preserved, but work on the huge canvas never proceeded beyond preliminary stages. In the end only four portrait heads were fully executed. At the Salon of 1791 David exhibited a detailed sepia drawing for his project. It was accompanied by a note explaining that at this stage accurate likenesses were not yet intended. None the less, this drawing served as a model

¹¹⁵ Frank Büttner, "Die Darstellung mittelalterlicher Geschichte in der deutschen Kunst des ausgehenden 18. Jahrhunderts" in *Mittelalter-Rezeption. Ein Symposium* ed. Peter Wapnewski (Stuttgart 1986) 407-34, esp. 407f. Strong, *When did you last see your father?* cit. 13, 16f. 33 and passim. *Romanticismo storico*. Firenze, La Meridiana di Palazzo Pitti, Dicembre 1973 — Febbraio 1974. Mostra a cura di Sandra Pinto (Florence 1974) 119ff.

for various engravings that were printed with an attached identification of those supposedly portrayed. Some men were included who had not attended that particular session but ought or, as David saw it, deserved to have been there.

The monumental size of his canvas alone would not be able to express David's conviction that then and there the French people, even mankind, had entered into a new era of their history. Only symbolism could do that. David reserved the foreground of his painting for three symbolic figures, who neatly detach themselves from the mass of historical deputies gradually fading away towards the background of the hall. The three embrace each other and were clearly intended to demonstrate the newly-found unanimity of social ranks and orders. Ideally, they might have represented the three estates and thus one of them might have been dressed in apparel typical of the nobility. But no members of the nobles' assembly were present at the occasion, and to this extent the painter bowed to historical reality. The three figures represent a Carthusian monk, a curé and a representative of the third estate in bourgeois dress.¹¹⁶ Members of the clergy had indeed begun to join the assembly of the third estate, but as it happened, no monks either were present on 20 June. Formal and ideological inspiration for the group of three figures must have come to David from such precedents as Henry Fuseli's *Oath of the Three Swiss* (1778-81) and, especially, his own *Oath of the Three Horatii* (1784), both representing great acts of patriotic devotion and moral resolve. David's *Horatii*, when first presented in public, had been received with storms of patriotic enthusiasm. It is significant that they were also exhibited in the Salon of 1791, together with the drawing for the *Tennis Court Oath*. David further underlined the symbolic significance of his scene by having it take place in the middle of a thunderstorm. A curtain is moved dramatically by a wind strong enough to blow away the Old Regime, and through a window we perceive a flash of lightening ominously pointed towards the royal palace. By 1797 the project had not significantly progressed. David estimated that three years' work and 150 000 francs would be needed to complete his huge canvas. In a letter to the minister of the interior he admitted that he could not account for the majority of those who had sworn the oath that day. In view of the fact

¹¹⁶ This man is often assumed to be a Huguenot minister. While some *pasteurs* were actually elected to the assembly of the third estate, the point David intended to make presumably was a political rather than an ecumenical one.

que la plupart sont fort insignifiants pour la postérité, soit dit entre nous, mon intention est d'y substituer tous ceux qui, depuis, se sont illustrés et qui, pour cette raison, intéressent bien plus nos neveux.

This final and most drastic departure from historical fact was never realized, however. In 1801 David announced through the newspapers that due to a lack of subscriptions he was forced to abandon the *Tennis Court Oath*.¹¹⁷

Among David's next masterpieces in tribute to revolutionary fervor was the picture of Joseph Bara (1794), an innocent youth killed by the counterrevolutionaries.¹¹⁸ Like the more famous portrait of the murdered Jean-Paul Marat (1793), it is primarily a statement of personal conviction and feelings. The slender figure, prostrate as if asleep, may not bear any likeness to the dead boy; on the other hand, the picture makes remarkably few concessions to the official propaganda, which blatantly distorted the facts to create a patriotic legend. In the major French history paintings of the next two decades the propagandist aim, though unmistakable, continued to be served with subtlety and discretion. The entire Napoleonic era was marked by official and semi-official sponsorship of huge canvasses depicting state ceremonies and battle scenes from Napoleon's campaigns. There is plenty of evidence for the great man's personal attention to such matters. He demanded of his painters both fastidious accuracy and ruthless deception. When David, now a reformed Jacobin, prepared to paint his extravagant *Bonaparte Crossing the Saint-Bernard* (1800-1), Napoleon told him that for a portrait of himself likeness mattered less than the rendering of genius.¹¹⁹ Among the many sketches David made in preparation for the monumental canvas recording the coronation ceremony of 2 December 1804, there is a crayon of Napoleon arrogantly crowning himself in the presence of a demurely-looking pope. In marked contrast, the completed canvas (1807) depicts

¹¹⁷ *Le Serment du Jeu de Paume. Fac-similé du texte et des signatures d'après le procès-verbal*, ed. with an introd. by Armand Brette (Paris 1893) xxxvi-lvi. David Lloyd Dowd, *Pageant-Master of the Republic. Jacques-Louis David and the French Revolution* (Lincoln, Nebraska 1948) 36-40 and plates. Klaus Holma, *David. Son évolution et son style* (Paris 1940) 58-64 and plates. Luc de Nanteuil, *Jacques-Louis David* (New York 1985) 104f., 110f. Walter Friedländer, *David to Delacroix* transl. R. Goldwater (Cambridge, Mass. 1966) 22f., 28f., 33, plates 1, 9-11. Rosenblum, *Transformations* cit. 68-82 and plates.

¹¹⁸ De Nanteuil, *Jacques-Louis David* cit. 112-14.

¹¹⁹ De Nanteuil, *Jacques-Louis David* cit. 36, 134f.

a far less provocative moment in the course of the ceremonies. No doubt Napoleon himself decided that David should paint him crowning Josephine, his empress, rather than himself.¹²⁰

Sponsorship often took the form of a public competition open to various artists. The participants were expected to follow detailed instructions that might be published in the *Moniteur* and the *Journal de Paris*, complete with explanatory sketches. In the case of battle scenes, the instructions were based on the official bulletins issued by the army and on accounts by eye-witnesses. The participants would submit sketches, which were publicly exhibited before a jury would announce a decision. The runners-up received minor prizes, while the successful entry might be slated for a place of honour in the Galerie de Diane of the Tuileries Palace or the Salle de l'Empereur of the Luxembourg. At some point the completed work might also be sent to the Gobelins factory for copying, and it might be reproduced in prints cheap enough to generate and serve public demand.¹²¹

Serious contenders for state commissions had to prepare themselves with great diligence. Antoine-Jean Gros (1771-1835), a student of David's and Napoleon's favourite history painter, examined enemy weapons and uniforms brought back by French officers among their personal booty. He also studied Napoleon's own statements in an effort to understand his intentions and capture the mood of the moment. Napoleon's reports to the Directorate from Egypt, for instance, were published repeatedly. It is there that Gros, as he himself noted, read about the fanatical bravery of an individual Mameluke warrior. In his *Combat near Nazareth* (1801) Gros translated Napoleon's remarks into an — obviously invented — figure of a Mameluke on horseback, rushing headlong into the French bayonets.¹²² The secret of Gros' success lay in his empathy with, and fine pictorial rendering of, Napoleon's propagandist intentions. His campaign pictures rarely offer combat scenes; more typically they present evidence of Napoleon's magnanimity and the humane, civilized behaviour of French soldiers. But war being war, testimonies to the noble heart are often in flagrant contradiction to the historical

¹²⁰ Friedländer, *David to Delacroix* cit. 28-30, plates 15-17. De Nanteuil, *Jacques-Louis David* cit. 36-43, 138f.

¹²¹ Brunner, *Antoine-Jean Gros* cit. 101-3, 139f., 191, 235-38, 303-7 and *passim*.

¹²² Brunner, *Antoine-Jean Gros* cit. 108, 192f. Rosenblum and Janson, *19th-Century Art* cit. 69f.

facts. In the *Combat near Nazareth* the central spot is given to a French dragoon who protects a prostrate Turk, willing to surrender, from the bayonet of a French infantryman. Now we know on the authority of the French commander, General Andoche Junot, that in this action, where the French were outnumbered ten to one, no prisoners could be taken. So, to complete Gros' little fantasy, the infantryman in the end was likely to have his way.¹²³

The monumental picture that proved decisive for Gros' reputation with his contemporaries showed Napoleon, as commander-in-chief of the Egyptian army, visiting the pesthouse of Jaffa (1804). On 11 March 1799 Napoleon had indeed inspected the place set aside to isolate French soldiers who had contracted the bubonic plague. Gros shows Napoleon, accompanied by two of his generals and the army's chief surgeon, Desgenettes,¹²⁴ surrounded by patients and medical officers. Napoleon extends a gloveless hand and touches the plague boil under the arm of one sufferer. If Gros invented this detail, his offence against the truth is pardonable. In his *Histoire médicale de l'Armée de l'Orient* (Paris 1802) Desgenettes gave a full account of Napoleon's visit. It does not mention such an episode but relates how the commander-in-chief lent a hand when the corpse of another victim, soiled with the effluent of an open boil, was raised. Gros truthfully rendered the purpose of Napoleon's visit, which was evidently to boost the morale of his sick men by demonstrating his solidarity with them and his confidence that their condition was not incurable. Just as faithfully, however, Gros rendered Napoleon's purpose in commissioning the huge canvas, four years later. The First Consul wished to impress the French public with the fatherly care he was wont to take of his men and also with his personal bravery. Typically, he wanted the latter demonstrated off the battlefield. Napoleon had his reasons, and it is here, on the level of intentions, that the legend Gros was asked to promote clashed sharply with the harsh reality of warfare. Jaffa to Napoleon meant a record he needed to live down. In 1802 a British officer, Robert Wilson,¹²⁵ published his *History of the British Expedition to Egypt*, which the year after also appeared in a French translation. Wilson claimed that Napoleon ordered the liquidation of 2400 Turkish prisoners, the entire garrison of the citadel

¹²³ Brunner, *Antoine-Jean Gros* cit. 100, 115-17.

¹²⁴ René-Nicolas Dufriche, baron Desgenettes (1762-1832). The generals are Louis-Alexandre Berthier and Jean-Baptiste Bessières.

¹²⁵ Robert Thomas Wilson (1777-1849), later governor of Gibraltar.

of Jaffa, disowning the promises that French officers had made to them when they surrendered. Wilson and other British sources also claimed that before his retreat from Syria Napoleon "had poisoned his own men." In 1803 the *Moniteur* reported that these very words were used during a debate in the British House of Commons. Desgenettes' book confirmed the occurrence. On leaving Jaffa, he explained, Napoleon commanded that twenty-five to thirty soldiers, too sick for removal, be given a lethal dose of opium in order to spare them a worse fate from the hands of the enemy. Gros' canvas, then, was commissioned to counteract adverse publicity.¹²⁶

The *Pesthouse of Jaffa* is just one of the many paintings created to demonstrate Napoleon's virtues, especially his considerateness towards friend and foe alike. For instance, works by Gros, Pierre-Narcisse Guérin, Carle Vernet and others interpret the great man's dealings with insurgents, showing clemency to those of Cairo (October 1798) and fair, controlled anger towards those of Madrid (December 1808). In both cases the clash between the painted legend and the historical facts is flagrant, if compared with the *Pesthouse of Jaffa*.¹²⁷ As a last instance we might examine Gros' monumental canvas of Napoleon inspecting the battlefield of Eylau in East Prussia, where his forces had just defeated the Russians and Prussians (8 February 1807). A Russian defeat, at least, was what French propaganda called the outcome. The battle, fought on snow, was costly and very bloody on both sides. The French remained in possession of the battlefield, but then withdrew and returned to their winter-quarters in Poland. In his memoirs composed at Saint Helena, Napoleon recalled that doubts had been cast on the French victory and that he had commissioned a picture to put them to rest. A competition was called and participant painters were given a comprehensive package of detailed instructions. Gros won and his canvas was exhibited in the Salon of 1808. He had found ways to extol a French 'victory' that went well beyond the feat of arms. While the snow-sprinkled corpses of dead Russians in the foreground attest to the ferocity of the engagement, Gros' real theme is the humanizing and civilizing force of the great French nation. With

¹²⁶ Brunner, *Antoine-Jean Gros* cit. 141-80. Rosenblum, *Transformations* cit. 95-97, plate 97. Rosenblum and Janson, *19th-Century Art* cit. 70f., colour plate 12. Brunner convincingly rejects an interpretation, according to which Gros' Napoleon at Jaffa stands in the pictorial tradition of Christ and other saintly healers and miracle-workers.

¹²⁷ Brunner, *Antoine-Jean Gros* cit. 181-86, 284-91. Rosenblum, *Transformations* cit. 98-101, plates 102-6.

the active participation of the surgeon-general, Pierre-Fançois Percy, members of the French medical corps assist the wounded Russians found lying on the battleground. The smooth efficiency of the French helpers contrasts with the barbarian looks of the Russians to be helped. Again this is pious fiction; the reality was different. Overburdened with the care for their own casualties, the sparse French medical personnel was unable to care for the wounded Russians. They were simply picked up and taken to the church of Eylau. There they were left to their own devices until four days later the surgeons of the returning Russian army arrived. Fittingly, Gros' finest effort at legend-making was reserved for Napoleon himself. His right arm raised in a gesture, of mourning perhaps, his glance lifted up to the sky, seemingly ignoring the sundry activities narrated in the picture, the hero is engaged in his lonely dialogue with destiny. The unwilling conqueror, the melancholy lover of peace amid the mess and the gore left over by the battle, the harbinger of higher civilization: this is precisely how Napoleon wished to be seen. The army bulletin of 2 March 1807 described his visit to the field of the recent battle along with the horrors there encountered and concluded: "*Ce spectacle est fait pour inspirer aux princes l'amour de la paix et l'horreur de la guerre.*" Gros had understood.¹²⁸

Napoleon's patronage of history art set a high standard of refinement for the nineteenth century. Few others would be able to meet it, although everywhere we find patrons and artists turning to historical subjects. And all were motivated by the twofold quest for accuracy and appropriateness, for factuality and exemplarity, with its potential for muddle and conflict. On occasion great efforts were made to steer clear of that danger; for a case in point let us turn from French painting to the sculptures of a German architectural monument. The Valhalla near Regensburg, although conceived along traditional lines, stands out for its unusually neat distinction between myth and critically conceived history. Profoundly romantic, it is also a tribute to German historicism. The Valhalla was the brainchild of Louis I (1786-1868), King of Bavaria from 1825 to 1848. At the beginning of 1807 Louis, then crown-prince, was on his way to Poland and a command in Napoleon's army that was soon to meet the Russians and

¹²⁸ Brunner, *Antoine-Jean Gros* cit. 233-83, here 237. Rosenblum, *Transformations* cit. 95-98, plate 100.

the Prussians at Eylau. To fight under Napoleon was distasteful to Louis, but Bavaria's alliance with the Emperor of the French left him no choice. He had recently seen the Panthéon in Paris, and now the idea of a temple to the glory of German heroes, past, present and future, was taking shape in his mind. The principal realization of that idea was the Valhalla, which commemorates great men and even a few women of all German nations, whereas the Bavarians, specifically, were honoured in the Ruhmeshalle at Munich. The Swiss historian Johannes von Müller advised Louis on the selection of worthy personalities, and the first portrait busts for the Valhalla were completed before the year ended. The building on its elevated location above the Danube was inspired by the Parthenon of Athens and designed by the leading Bavarian architect, Leo von Klenze, who also oversaw the construction. The inauguration took place in 1842.¹²⁹

It was a basic requirement that all busts had to be modelled after authentic portraits. But how was one to honour those heroes whose likenesses could not be found? Most figures of German Antiquity and the Middle Ages fell into this category. Louis discussed the problem repeatedly with Klenze; eventually commemorative name plaques were chosen. Although the Valhalla continues a tradition that we had first encountered with the Renaissance galleries of portraits, Louis applied principles of historical criticism unheard-of in the days of Giovio and Thevet.¹³⁰ If one looks through the list of those honoured with a bust, one is reassured that in each case finding an authentic likeness should not have proved particularly difficult. It is true that the achievement of authenticity was facilitated by the monarchic slant of Louis' idea of a person of merit. The single largest group of those selected were men of high princely rank and thus most likely to be known from portraits made while they were alive. It is striking that no concessions were made to historical myth. If they were deemed to be unhistorical, even the most appealing heroes, a Siegfried for instance, were excluded. William Tell too was banned, although the Three Swiss who swore the Rütli oath received a commemorative plaque. Tell's saga was also remembered indirectly through the busts of its principal historians, Aegidius Tschudi and Johannes von Müller. The

¹²⁹ See, also for the following discussion, Stolz, *Die Walhalla* cit. 18f., 53f., 85 and passim. Scharf, *Kleine Kunstgeschichte des deutschen Denkmals* cit. 169-71, 253 and passim, tables 127-29. Short, illustrated tourist guides to the Valhalla were written by Adalbert Müller, Max Rheudé and others.

¹³⁰ See above pp. 204-6.

strict observation of facticity did not apply to the sculptural relief decoration on the interior friezes and the two tympana on the outside of the building. Here historical figures and events of the Germanic past were allowed to mingle with the gods and goddesses of Germanic mythology. The battle in the Teutoburg Forest on the north frieze had been mentioned earlier in another context.¹³¹ Any discriminating viewer must have realized that amid such symbolic representations of a national culture the figures of Arminius and Thusnelda were appropriate, although of course no authentic portraits existed. Among the monuments of its kind, the Valhalla may well be exceptional in meticulously separating *fabula* from *historia* by means of figurative representation. On the other hand, the simple ideological message of old-German valour and probity seems old-fashioned in comparison with the sophisticated political manipulation practised by the French history painters.

In the autumn of 1842 the young Jacob Burckhardt visited a large exhibition of contemporary art in Berlin. He noted that German history painting so far had failed to rise to the challenge of comparable work created in the neighbouring nations to the west.¹³² It is doubtful whether Burckhardt would have judged differently later in life, when a new generation of German artists engaged to celebrate the historic exploits of Bismarck and his associates. A somewhat pedestrian approach to the problems of accuracy and appropriateness can be discovered in the work of Anton von Werner (1843-1915) as well as in the taste of his Wilhelmine patrons. Werner accompanied the Prussian army on the last phase of the Franco-German war of 1870-71 and came into prominence with the pictures he drew from that experience. Uniquely favoured by three generations of the Hohenzollern imperial family, he became the history painter par excellence and an empire builder in his own right. A sort of Bismarck of the palette, he controlled the Berlin art scene for a quarter of a century.¹³³ If Theodor Mommsen proclaimed the advent of a super-scholarship, "*Grosswissenschaft*," commensurate to the potential and

¹³¹ See above p. 186.

¹³² Kaegi, *Jacob Burckhardt* cit. II 231-38. Paret, *Art as History* cit. 23

¹³³ Dominik Bartmann, *Anton von Werner. Zur Kunst und Kunstpolitik im deutschen Kaiserreich* (Berlin 1985) 32f. and passim for what follows here. Paret, *Art as History* cit. 165-80.

the ambitions of the German "*Grossstaat*,"¹³⁴ Werner with his helpers and rivals engaged in creating a kind of *Grosskunst* worthy of the Hohenzollern and their *Reich*. To this effect they covered copious square yards of canvas and stucco with their near-photographic brush work. Love of exact detail was a disposition that Werner evidently shared with his patrons and a large section of the German public; authenticity was a most serious business to him. The countless sketches of portraits, uniforms, geographical sites, and so on, with which he prepared for his great canvasses, show him as a skilled draftsman. In the garden of his villa at Wannsee — for colder days he had a house-cum-studio in the city — he deployed at certain times mannequins and even live soldiers wearing a whole arsenal of different uniforms. He also consulted general staff maps and made experiments to study the spread of gunpowder vapours.¹³⁵ Despite his eagerness for autopsy, however, many of his pictures suggest a formal dependence on the French history painters, and that not only for scenes of battles he had not been able to witness personally.

One of Werner's earliest, and finest, military pictures shows General Helmuth von Moltke and his staff on a hill, with the city of Paris in the background. The battle of 19 September 1870 is over and the German armies are approaching the French capital. At the foot of the hill, a train of infantry with field pieces is advancing. The soldiers, who have just become aware of the presence of their commander-in-chief, burst into an ovation, not unlike an audience applauding the lead actor up on the stage. To judge from the number of his successive portraits of Moltke, Werner was justly fascinated by this extraordinary soldier and man. For the scene before Paris he made several sketches from life, in addition to securing a photograph of Moltke sitting grotesquely in the saddle of a wooden dummy horse.¹³⁶

Sometimes Werner succeeded in attaching striking symbolic significance to an accurately rendered detail. In the picture of Moltke

¹³⁴ Often quoted, the famous words were pronounced in 1890, on receiving Adolf Harnack into the Prussian Academy: "... wie der *Grossstaat* und die *Grosswirtschaft*, so ist die *Grosswissenschaft*, die nicht von Einem geleistet, aber von Einem geleitet wird, ein notwendiges Element unserer Kulturentwicklung ...": Theodor Mommsen, *Reden und Aufsätze* (Berlin 1905) 209; cf. Karl Christ, *Von Gibbon zu Rostovtzeff. Leben und Werk führender Althistoriker der Neuzeit* (Darmstadt 1972) 103; Gossman, "Basle, Bachofen and the Critique of Modernity" cit. 173.

¹³⁵ Bartmann, *Anton von Werner* cit. 46f., 93. Paret, *Art as History* cit. 173.

¹³⁶ Bartmann, *Anton von Werner* cit. 37-45 and plates. The picture is in the Kunsthalle Kiel.

before Paris, Quartermaster-General Theophil von Podbielski points his arm in direction of the capital. Directly under his hand a building stands out, dominating the Paris skyline. It is the Dome des Invalides, tomb of Napoleon I. Evidently Werner wanted his viewers to know that the Germans had come to settle an account. In a particularly subtle fashion the same message is conveyed by a detail in Werner's great canvas depicting the proclamation of the new *Kaiser* in the Gallery of Mirrors of the Versailles palace, a picture that will be discussed below. The hall's architecture is rendered with painstaking precision. On its decorated ceiling Werner shows discreetly, but in a central position, the panel with an inscription belonging to a fresco which is cut off by the upper margin of the canvas. The inscription reads: "*Passage du Rhin en présence des ennemis, 1672.*"¹³⁷ The symbolism is hardly hampered by the fact that it was not Louis XIV's Dutch War of 1672, but rather the following campaign of 1688-89, that led to the long-remembered devastation of the German Rhineland. Two hundred years later history had run its course and the French outrages had been revenged. Not all of Werner's ventures into symbolism were so subtle. After the Franco-German war, the new *Kaiser* and his Prussian army held a victory parade in Berlin (16 June 1871). Large painted panels were hung across the Unter den Linden Boulevard near the Brandenburg Gate. One of them was the work of Werner. It showed Arminius, whose progress we followed earlier,¹³⁸ and his brave Cherusicans overrunning the Roman lines. Werner gave Arminius the features of William I; under the tail of the *Kaiser's* black horse he placed a prostrate Roman crowned with a laurel wreath. The Roman's face was a likeness of the defeated Napoleon III. When asked to change the imprudent detail, Werner refused. Eventually, his panel could be displayed, but the ominous spot was covered up.¹³⁹

Given the taste and finicky disposition of his patrons, Werner had to be careful when his desired effect involved a departure from factual accuracy. His most important commission was to paint the proclamation of the new German *Kaiserreich* at Versailles, on 18 January 1871. The picture became the fetish of the Wilhelmine age and continues to be reproduced in numerous text books of nineteenth century history.¹⁴⁰ On his eightieth birthday, 22 March 1877,

¹³⁷ Bartmann, *Anton von Werner* cit. 103f., plates 46, 74.

¹³⁸ See above pp. 179-88, 346.

¹³⁹ Bartmann, *Anton von Werner* cit. 64-68 and plates.

¹⁴⁰ Bartmann, *Anton von Werner* cit. 96-111 and plates, also for what follows here.

William I was surprised with a huge canvas covering nearly thirty-five square meters. The picture, hung in the Berlin town palace, was a gift from the German princes and Free Cities and had been in the making for almost six years. The principal sponsor was Grandduke Frederick I of Baden, the emperor's son-in-law. He kept asking for the inclusion of ever more attenders of the Versailles ceremony. In the end Werner had made portrait sketches of no less than 128 dignitaries and transferred their likenesses to his canvas. A printed diagram identified each with his name and title or military rank. Werner himself was among the very few attenders shown to wear civilian dress. He had specifically been brought to Versailles to witness the ceremony and, having been present, was justified in portraying himself, modestly tucked away in the lower right corner. Afterwards he received several more commissions to produce paintings of the Versailles proclamation, but in keeping with the terms of his original contract with the Grandduke of Baden, he had to make significant changes in his concept. One of the new versions was destined for the Berlin armory. When William I saw it, on 8 November 1882, he criticized the representation of Bismarck. Contrary to fact and to the earlier palace version, Werner had portrayed the chancellor wearing the white uniform of a cuirassier. The eye-catching uniform further enhances Bismarck's central position in the picture, and since in the days immediately leading up to the proclamation William had been resentful of Bismarck's deals, it may well be that the *Kaiser* objected as much to the prominence as to the wrong dress Werner had given the chancellor. The painter defended himself smartly, explaining that accuracy was not appropriate in this case. He argued that all cuirassiers attending the ceremony were wearing their white uniforms and that Bismarck was obliged to do likewise but had failed to pack that particular outfit, when he set out for France. William's reply was good-natured: "You are right, he was wrongly dressed (*falsch angezogen*), and you have done very well to set the matter right." And the *Kaiser* continued to be gracious about his painter's priorities. On 1 April 1885 Bismarck received a third version of Werner's *Proclamation* as a gift of the imperial family to mark his seventieth birthday. In this, the so-called Friedrichsruh version, the white uniform was used again to set Bismarck off against his entourage, and other devices were added to make his position even more prominent. Moreover, his friend and close associate, the Prussian minister of war, Albrecht von Roon, was appropriately appearing on his side, although

Roon, having caught a cold, had been unable to attend the ceremony.¹⁴¹

Bismarck's white cuirassier's uniform might perhaps suggest that Werner developed a well-defined concept as to when it was permissible to substitute appropriateness for factual accuracy. It seems more likely, however, that he acted intuitively and waited to see what his patrons and the public would tolerate. There were no problems with his canvasses for the town hall of Saarbrücken (1880), one of which was again, as it were, correcting a historical accident. The picture entitled *His Majesty Entering Saarbrücken* showed William as he was greeted by the municipal dignitaries. In reality, no delegation was on hand to greet the monarch when he arrived — a day late.¹⁴² Werner's doctoring of the facts proved less acceptable, when the latter were politically sensitive, as was the insult to Napoleon III that was mentioned above. In 1874 he produced designs for a mosaic frieze to be added to the colonnade of the victory column on the Berlin Königsplatz. On one of his sketches he showed how a male youth representing Bavaria offered William an imperial crown. This was a rather devious allusion to the famous antecedents of the Versailles proclamation. King Louis II of Bavaria had sent a crucial letter inviting William to be the German emperor, but Louis had done so under duress and his letter had been drafted by none other than Bismarck, his arch-opponent. The Bavarian king was not present at Versailles, and the crown of the new empire was symbolical at best; no real one was ever produced. On another part of his designs for the same frieze Werner had wisely omitted Bavaria among the heavily armed allegories of Prussia, Baden and Württemberg, who are rushing to the rescue of Germania. When William objected to Werner's allegorical coronation act, his effigy was replaced by another Germania receiving the crown from the Bavarian youth. Perhaps as a surrogate for the William 'Barbablanca' thus absent from the column, Werner added yet another version of the endlessly repeated awakening of the mythical Barbarossa.¹⁴³

Werner's version of the offering of the imperial crown may be compared to that of Hermann Wislicenus (1825-99), who decorated between 1877 and 1897 the heavily restored Carolingian Kaiserpfalz

¹⁴¹ Bartmann, *Anton von Werner* cit. 111-20 and plates.

¹⁴² Bartmann, *Anton von Werner* cit. 55-59 and plates. Paret, *Art as History* cit. 172f.

¹⁴³ Bartmann, *Anton von Werner* cit. 69, 73, 80-84. Scharf, *Kleine Kunstgeschichte des deutschen Denkmals* cit. 199-207, plate 147. For Barbarossa see pp. 142-44, 345.

of Goslar. His cycle of murals shows climactic moments in the history of the medieval empire as well as the new one of 1871, which was thus proclaimed to be a renewal of the old. Wislicenus had the temerity to show Louis II actually tendering the non-extant crown in direction of William I. Although the location is not Versailles, Louis is shown in the company of other German princes who, unlike himself, were present at the Versailles proclamation. Not surprisingly, Wislicenus was criticized by the contemporary press for his arbitrary departure from historical fact and contemptuously ignored by the imperial court. In another of his Goslar murals he depicted Barbarossa emerging from the Kyffhäuser, sword in hand and looking towards William I 'Barbablanca,' portrayed on the opposite wall. The features of the medieval emperor are remarkably similar to the ones of the modern one. The juxtaposition is taken up again by the huge equestrian statues of the two heroes that in 1899 were placed in front of the building. Finally, a fresco of the Berlin Ruhmeshalle, painted by Friedrich Geselschap, 1884-90, went as far as amalgamating the modern *Kaiser* with his mythical antecedent, rather than only juxtaposing them.¹⁴⁴

In a way Anton von Werner shared the fate of the bombastic Wilhelmine age that he represented so well. Many of his major works were lost in the Second World War together with the public buildings and monuments for which they had been created. With its extreme form of realism, nineteenth-century history painting is still exciting and popular, although after David it soon ceased to be representative of the truly creative developments in the arts. Modern technology relies on other means, such as film or *son et lumière*, to bring history to life, and modern art is exploring forms of reality that have nothing to do with the frontier between *historia* and *fabula*.

¹⁴⁴ Monika Arndt, *Die Goslarer Kaiserpfalz als Nationaldenkmal. Eine ikonographische Untersuchung* (Hildesheim 1976) 16-22, 53-55, 63, 67-69, 76f. 79f., plates 2, 20, 38, 124.

CONCLUSION

It was stated in the Introduction to this book and it needs to be repeated here: since elements of *fabula* occur in every facet of historical thinking this investigation ought to have dealt with an unconscionable multitude of sources. The material actually chosen for analysis is a puny fraction of what might have been considered. Moreover, since the sum total of what might have been considered is impossible even to survey, every selection is bound to be discretionary. On the preceding pages many examples were chosen because of their intrinsic interest, while others were ignored that might have carried greater weight or been more representative. This being so, many of the following conclusions must be tentative. Not all of them, though. We have tried to understand the relationship between fact and fiction in the historical thought of successive periods, and, up to a point, the findings confirm widely held views about the general characteristics of these periods. To have found what could be expected must lend validity to our conclusions, but if this were all, validity could not compensate for the lack of new insight. The central question this book has been addressing is, as we have seen, a very old one. But its relevance to historical thinking through the ages has not before, I believe, been demonstrated in a comprehensive fashion. In so far as we have succeeded in presenting a variety of reactions to the old quandary as to fact and fiction in history, we can claim to have shed some new light on a familiar picture.

In the Old Testament we recognize a rudimentary concept of 'linear' history reaching from the creation of the universe to prophetic visions of the end of mankind. The past is formed by the unbroken chain of Yahweh's interventions in the human sphere. This concept of sacred history finds concrete expression in the historical books of the Old Testament. They offer an unprecedented chronicle of the people of Israel and its outstanding men and women. What is of special interest to this study is that this historical narrative owes its remarkable complexity in good part to the inclusion of foreign myths and domestic legends. The Greeks, we know, were wonderfully gifted with imagination but also made great strides in the development of rational thinking. They were great inventors of myths but also advanced the earliest logical distinctions between fiction and factual

reality. They realized that their *mythoi* lay outside the field of *historia*, rational inquiry. What is not so often considered, however, is the amazing degree to which Graeco-Roman Antiquity became aware of the inherent ambivalence of the notion of factual truth as opposed to fiction. Whenever the Greek and Roman historiographers set out to draw the line between *historia* and *fabula*, they also experienced a need to blunt the sharp edges of this distinction. They put invented speeches into the mouth of historical figures and even offered a rational defence for doing so. They understood that in so far as a state was grounded on religious foundations it would be appropriate to retain patriotic and pious myths within the structure of national history. What in the Old Testament occurred unwittingly was done here with deliberation. Moreover, the classical authors expected history to teach moral lessons and accepted that factual accuracy might have to be sacrificed so as to make the examples of the past more effective.

Historical thinking in the Middle Ages was marked by a general retreat from the more rational attitudes that had prevailed in ancient historiography. It is true that the Romans had allowed themselves to be impressed by portents and auguries, but such an inclination pales in comparison to the wide play given to the supernatural in many medieval chronicles. As the Romantics were to discover, the naive acceptance of miracles and fables by such authors as Vincent of Beauvais and Jacobus a Voragine can be a source of special delight to us moderns and a welcome contrast to our own sober mentality. For better or worse, medieval Christianity drew inspiration from the concept of history developed in the Old Testament. As it had been under the sway of Yahweh, religion was seen again as causative force that moved history along. What deserved to be analysed in depth was not the individual motivation of a human actor but the dependence of all human action upon the divine will. The majesty of divine intervention was fully revealed over the entire course of history. Thus the universal chronicle was particularly suited to lend expression to medieval ways of viewing the past. And the universal chronicle would not only incorporate the myths and legends of the Old Testament and pagan Antiquity but also freely accept more recent ones. The concept of sacred history does not easily accommodate a critical inquiry into the factuality of particular events. No longer could *historia* and *fabula* be treated with even that limited level of distinctiveness that they had been accorded in classical Antiquity. But, as our discussion of the *Legenda aurea* has shown, the basic inclination to credulousness was

sometimes checked by other factors. If history was to instruct and enlighten, it needed to demonstrate coherence in general patterns and consistency in particular cases. This in turn required a certain willingness to view traditions critically and modify them, when it seemed indicated to do so. Any rash generalizations about medieval historiography will be discouraged by the fact that the same generation could produce a historian as sophisticated and prudent as Otto of Freising and another as fanciful as Geoffrey of Monmouth. It is also true, however, that Geoffrey wielded great influence, whereas Otto did not.

The Renaissance is generally credited with a resurgence of critical thinking. To Petrarch miracles were automatically suspect. Boccaccio may remind one of Herodotus in that he approached ancient mythology with a constant eagerness to ask: "can this be true?" Dante distinguished sharply between human beings of the past that we might call historical and other characters that we might call mythological. Erasmus of Rotterdam was prepared to relegate the Homeric heroes to that latter category. But the need for critical scrutiny was only one aspect of Renaissance infatuation with classical mythology and history. Another aspect was the old and new uses to which such compelling myths as the Golden Age and the Amazons were put. The new uses often reflected manifestations of national sentiment and pride. The new "Amazon," Joan of Arc, was viewed with different forms of national bias, depending on whether the commentators were French, Burgundian or English. On the basis of historical information gained from Tacitus, Arminius was proposed to the Germans as an inspirational model. William Tell, the mythical hero of the Swiss, owed no debt to classical Antiquity, but scores of fanciful genealogies enlisted the heroes of ancient myth in the service of Renaissance patriotic and dynastic loyalties, perhaps in a rather playful way. In all these cases it should be noted that popular response to the pursuit of national enhancement remained limited. There were few traces as yet of the mass-appeal that nationalist swagger would elicit in the nineteenth century. In general, a balance was preserved between rational critique and mythmaking. The need for harmonization was felt and addressed. For instance, the smooth integration of the Tell myth into the historical account of Swiss independence offers a lively

contrast to Vincent of Beauvais' handling of Charlemagne, in which fact and fairy tale confront each other in a crude fashion.¹

The Early Modern Age leads up to a climactic moment in the development that we have set out to investigate. Coinciding with the period of great political revolutions on both continents of the western hemisphere (1773-1848), there occurred a breakthrough that gave *historia* and *fabula* fully separate identities. In classical and biblical studies the distinctive spheres of myth and history were clearly understood and defined. For the first time it became unproblematic to assign Noah's Flood and Romulus' fratricide to myth, whereas Solomon's temple and Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon belonged to history. Henceforward the two classifications could be applied spontaneously, without reflexion, the way we often do it today. The breakthrough, however, did not come unopposed. If in the preceding age of the Renaissance moderate doses of critical reasoning had been used to explore the frontiers of factuality, seventeenth-century authors, in particular, employed a profusion of pseudo-critical reasoning to prove that feats like Israel's crossing of the Red Sea did not offend the laws of nature and therefore could be taken as historical. Heroic efforts were undertaken to ensure that traditional stories could be believed without discomfort. This in turn required great courage on the part of the brave radicals who argued that they could not. We have noted that a modern theory of myth was first developed by classical scholars; the crucial test, however, and the decisive victory came when it was applied to the Old Testament.

From the early decades of the nineteenth century the essential tools for the distinction of *fabula* and *historia* were fully available; there existed a workable theory of myth on the one hand, and a perfected method of critical *Quellenforschung* on the other. How were they applied? Excessively, in some cases, as it happens in the enthusiasm generated by fresh discoveries. Myth per se is not our subject. Otherwise we might have noted how the brothers Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm applied their romantic concept of myth to archaic and even medieval literature, how they understood the great epic poems, both ancient and medieval, to have begun as collective creations of the people at large ². On the other hand, we did look at some cases of

¹ Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum historiale* (1624) cit. 962-71 (Book 24.1-25).

² Wilhelm Grimm, *Kleinere Schriften*, ed. Gustav Hinrichs (Berlin 1881-87) I 92-99. In consequence of his mythical understanding of the past, Grimm sees the Nibelungen epic as a factual account. Cf. Baumeister in *Der Mythos von Orient und Occident* cit. cxxxviii-cxlv.

excessive criticism, when historical sources were scrutinized and at first found to be worthless fakes. Later they were redeemed at great expense of scholarly application. Thus documents taken to be spurious were ultimately proved to be authentic. This was a significant reversal. For centuries the ones to win in the end had normally been the critics of tradition; here, exceptionally, the critics stood defeated and the tradition was vindicated. Some such excesses were bound to occur as the new methodology asserted itself, but more important, in retrospect, are the limits beyond which the critical rules could not be applied. Historiography, whether narrative or analytical, always involves assumptions, and historians are expected to make clear in their work where factuality ends and assumption takes over. To do so, as we have seen, was impossible if the account of things past was pictorial rather than verbal.³ The vogue of history art coincided with the exceptional popularity of historical narratives, and though the presence of *fabula* in history painting was not greatly pondered, it was an everyday occurrence.

Powerful incentives for the retention of historical myths, and even the creation of new ones, came from nineteenth-century nationalism. The potential of mythistory for the nurturing of national sentiment had been discovered in the Renaissance, if not earlier. Individual characters of a distant past had been presented as loadstars for patriotic conduct, but not until the nineteenth century did they achieve a genuine mass-appeal.⁴ Joan of Arc, William Tell, even Arminius were placed on pedestals in public places, as if they could be ranked among the princes or saints who had traditionally been honoured in this way. It took the convergence of nationalism with the Romantic love of history to bring about this development. Politically and ideologically motivated mythmaking would also flourish in the twentieth century. Communism, antisemitic Nazism, Japan's Shinto revival and many other movements would present their own biased interpretations of the past, but at least in the West individual heroes of the Middle Ages and other distant days no longer played such a vital part in relaying the ideological message to the masses. Untouched by the strident manifestations of nineteenth-century nationalism, Bachofen in the calm of provincial obscurity created a most exciting

³ Of course, verbalization too will inevitably modify the reality of the past, but this is a subject better left to the philosophers of history. See e.g. Paul Ricoeur, *The Reality of the Historical Past* (Milwaukee 1984).

⁴ This point has been convincingly made by František Graus; see above p. 346f.

new historical myth. Subjecting ancient myths to a sophisticated examination, he expected to find new historical insights. He did, but above all he discovered matriarchy. Typically, it was communism and more recently feminism, ideologies with a certain disposition for mythistory, that have kept the myth of archaic matriarchy alive.

Finally, leaving aside specific periods, what can we say about the interaction of *historia* and *fabula* in general? Not much with regard to archaic times. In the Introduction we have looked briefly at the Ancient Near East and found that the development of a historical consciousness was slow and gradual. That means that the oldest myths and tales may well reflect prehistorical conditions and epoch-spanning developments, but it is difficult to argue that they reflect much by way of specific events.⁵ The question whether all epic narratives of heroic times, including the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, are based on a nucleus of factual events and real personages has generated some controversy among historians of literature.⁶ The general historian lacks the investigative tools to pronounce an opinion. As we have stated at the outset, for the purposes of this study myth is defined as a story that cannot be traced back to recognizable historical facts. As the term is applied in this book, myth is migratory, and thus the tale of the Flood, for instance, may have taken root both in regions prone to suffer inundations and in others that are not. It is very well to propose, as Heyne and Eichhorn did, a structural division of myths into historical ones, which are based on factual events, and others, which are not. But, as they experienced for themselves and the work of H.M. and N.K. Chadwick confirms, to apply such a distinction in concrete cases is fraught with danger and often impossible.

With myths and legends located in historical time we may begin to see a little clearer. The more factual information we have about events and persons mentioned in a tale, the better obviously our chances to

⁵ Eliade, *Cosmos and History* cit. 43: "If certain epic poems preserve what is called 'historical truth,' this truth almost never has to do with definite persons and events, but with institutions, customs, landscapes."

⁶ In discussing oral narrative poetry, H.M. and Nora Chadwick reject the opinion of "those scholars who hold that heroes are of mythical origin," but they concede that much fictional material may have been added to the original factual account. "Myth is the last — not the first — stage in the development of a hero." It seems that the Chadwicks affirm nuclear factuality because they are "sceptical of (constructive) imagination attributed to the ancients," even of their ability to invent heroes' names. See H. Munro and Nora Kershaw Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature* (Cambridge 1932-40) I 230-33, III 762-64, 770f.

clarify its genesis. The Chadwicks found the popular heroes of Yugoslav oral poetry particularly revealing in this regard. Mircea Eliade used their material, and also other Balkan sources, to demonstrate how reality in popular memory does fade to the point where archetypal traits can be fitted into the story. Marko Kraljevič lived in the latter part of the fourteenth century; he was probably killed in battle in 1394. He held the castle of Prilep in Macedonia as a vassal of the Turkish sultan — a fact that curiously did not prevent him from becoming the great national hero of the Serbians. In the First Balkan War of 1912 the fortress of Prilep was held by a Turkish force equipped with guns. Serbian infantry took it by assault, defying their commander, who attempted to restrain them. Afterwards the soldiers justified their action by assuring that they all had suddenly seen Marko Kraljevič and that he had led them to the charge.⁷ In the tales of Marko and other popular heroes the Chadwicks found plenty of motives derived from myth. They thought that initially the fictional nature of such elements was well understood, but that they came to be taken for true as time went by. Marko's mother often is a *vila*, a fairy, and so is his wife. In many of his actions he associates with John Hunyadi, although this latter hero was born at the earliest towards the very end of Marko's life.⁸ Descent from supernatural ancestors and chronological confusion, one might remember, are elements that we have found frequently in the non-factual tales discussed in preceding chapters.⁹ Marko himself performs mythical feats such as the slaying of a three-headed dragon. Other Yugoslav folk heroes shoot apples, leap over a number of horses and recognize their bride amid a number identically dressed girls.¹⁰ Eliade notes that the association of Marko Kraljevič with John Hunyadi can be traced back to the seventeenth century. Elsewhere too he finds that the mythicization of historical figures occurs after a comparable lapse of two to three centuries. "The recollection of a historical event or a real personage survives in popular memory for two or three centuries at

⁷ H.M. and N.K. Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature* cit. II 310, 389.

⁸ H.M. and N. K. Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature* cit. II 312f., 374f., III 762-64.

⁹ See e.g. the confusion caused by various Herods and Jacobus a Voragine's efforts to sort them out, p. 69f.; Virgil's association of Aeneas with Dido and critical reactions: Index, s.v. Dido; Tanaquil's association with successive generations of Tarquinii and Bachofen's comments, p. 366; also genealogical constructions from the ancient Egyptians all the way to the Renaissance, p. 189f.

¹⁰ H.M. and N.K. Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature* cit. II 380.

the utmost.”¹¹ Some two centuries after his death, Dieudonné de Gozon (d. 1353), third Grand Master of the Knights of St. John at Rhodes, is presented as another St. George slaying the dragon.¹² An analogous lapse of time occurred between the historical birth of an independent Swiss Confederacy and the earliest known references to apple-shooting William Tell. At this point Tell’s tale was promptly inserted into the narratives of the Swiss struggle for independence.¹³

This is not say that invariably centuries must go by before the consciousness of historical reality is lost to the point that fictional elements can be accommodated. Eliade mentions a ballad recorded in the Maramureş region of Rumania just before the Second World War. A young man of the region is engaged to be married. A few days before the wedding he falls victim to the jealousy of a mountain fairy, who flings him down from a cliff. The investigating folklorist discovered that the young man had been killed accidentally less than forty years earlier. His bride, by now an old woman, was still alive and described the accident realistically, as it had occurred. But the villagers clung to the fairy-tale version and argued that the old woman had lost the correct memory in the surfeit of her grief.¹⁴ On preceding pages too a number of cases was recorded, in which the mythicization of factual events began to occur almost at once. Throughout the ages and down to quite recent times people could be found who refused to believe, even in the face of patent evidence, that a certain monarch or other celebrity had died. Rather the person alleged to be dead — our example was the emperor Frederick Barbarossa — was in hiding for a while and would re-emerge at the proper time.¹⁵ Joan of Arc began to be mythicized while still alive, and Pope Silvester II soon after his death. According to Reimarus and Strauss, the bodily resurrection of the historical Jesus also began to be believed without delay.¹⁶ Arminius was mythicized twice: a century after his death by Tacitus, and again by Hutten fourteen hundred years later.¹⁷ Of the Popess Joan we can find no trace for at least three centuries following the events that may have led to the fabrication of

¹¹ Eliade, *Cosmos and History* cit. 43f.

¹² Eliade, *Cosmos and History* cit. 39.

¹³ See above pp. 172-74.

¹⁴ Eliade, *Cosmos and History* cit. 44-46.

¹⁵ See above p. 138.

¹⁶ See above pp. 328f., 332.

¹⁷ See above pp. 180-84.

her legend, while the myth of the year 1000 was invented after five hundred years.¹⁸

It would thus seem that the mythicization of historical occurrences is possible practically at any distance in time from the event to be transformed. Moreover it would seem that in certain periods — for instance, the thirteenth century, the time around 1500 and the age of Romanticism — powers of imagination were set in motion that proved unusually keen on creating and circulating myths and legends. It is tempting to suggest that a certain affinity must exist between an elevated taste for history and the creation of successful and enduring historical fiction. *Historia* and *fabula*, after all, are twin creatures; their relationship is supportive rather than antagonistic. Many cases discussed in this book suggest that incidents of superior mythmaking often coincide with singular achievements in historiography. Great historians — a Tacitus, a Guicciardini, a Gibbon, a Michelet — were themselves not infrequently great mythmakers. And is it no more than a curious coincidence that Geoffrey of Monmouth, the genial producer of the Arthurian legend, was an exact contemporary of Otto of Freising, the greatest of medieval historians, and that Jacobus a Voragine wrote at the same time as Vincent of Beauvais and Martinus Polonus, both of whom shared Jacobus' delight in tall tales but not his discreet sense of criticism? A period from the late fifteenth century to the middle of the sixteenth spanned the creation of the Tell myth, the fakes of Annius and Trithemius and the fantasies of Jean Lemaire de Belges together with the historical masterpieces of Commynes, Machiavelli and Guicciardini. Bachofen, whose achievements were mostly on the side of *fabula*, must nevertheless be ranked among the timeless classics emerging from the school of Romantic historicism, on a par with Burckhardt, his contemporary and compatriot, with Ranke, with Michelet. It makes sense to suggest that such simultaneous flourishing of *fabula* and *historia* is no mere coincidence but rather the result of serious and abiding interest in the past.

Fabula thus is the constant companion of *historia*. Ultimately historical myths and legends spring from the same fountainhead as factual accounts of past events. That fountainhead is the basic human need to explore persons and events of days bygone, in order to enhance one's understanding of the present world and one's role in it. The goal of such exploration is to find out what actually happened, to

¹⁸ See above pp. 98-102, 214.

discover truth, not falsehood. In this sense, *historia* is the norm to be aimed for, and *fabula* is an aberration, a miscarriage of *historia*. On the other hand, it is precisely the necessity to interpret, to digest, to adapt the past to one's needs, which offers an incentive to go beyond factuality or even ignore it. In the course of our investigation we have encountered a number of causes that bring about the production of *fabula* in the place of *historia*. People always and everywhere enjoy a good story. Fictional elements may be introduced in order to improve on the bare facts so as to make a commonplace tale more exclusive and exciting to the discriminating members of the public. Likewise, archetypal material, or merely clichés, may be added for the benefit of those who thrive on repetition. The association of Prester John with Mongol migrations and invasions may point in the first direction, while much of the evidence presented by Eliade favours the second. There are, however, no clear-cut categories. The overriding aim is always the creation of a good story, and just the most successful and enduring matches of *historia* with *fabula* are often obtained by combining old saws and novel twists. In this way archetypal material was put to good use in tales ranging from Judas and Pilate to the Popess Joan and Silvester II. The Euhemeristic constructions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were sometimes based on the same formula. The Chadwicks and Eliade collected numerous examples to show how the memory of facts fades in the course of time, clearing the way for the insertion of mythical features. But factual truth, especially unwelcome truth, may also be instantly suppressed rather than gradually forgotten. In this sense we can understand the refusal to accept the death of inspirational figures, no matter how well it is documented.¹⁹

Individual fabricators of historical myths and legends may either align themselves to popular taste or, more ambitiously, may wish to change it. We have often found that *fabula* sprang from a political or an ideological purpose. A wish to vent spite or conceal embarrassment, a desire to indoctrinate or to edify or merely to amuse the public — these are the common causes of deliberate departure from factual truth. But *fabula* may also result from the proper exercise of professional skills. So it did when history painters were obliged to

¹⁹ See above pp. 120, 138. A Russian popular ballad shows that people preferred to believe that Czars Ivan IV and Peter the Great had come close to killing their own sons but had restrained themselves in the nick of time, whereas in fact the sons were killed: see H.M and N.K. Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature* cit. II 128, III 762.

fill in the visual gaps left open by the factual information on record. We have argued an analogous justification when ancient authors supplied historical figures with invented speeches.²⁰ In historical writing the difference between legitimate deduction from known facts and improper streamlining of the evidence in the superficial interest of logic and coherence is often tenuous. The best historical scholarship is bound to be imaginative, and if it nets such products of *fabula* as Bachofen's construction of a matriarchal age, the enrichment is worth the fallacy. Bachofen, and before him, Perizonius and even Heyne attempted to authenticate *fabula*, that is, to ascertain in a scholarly fashion that what they believed to have happened had actually happened, although there were no records to prove it. Their endeavours were bound to fail and they did, but the lessons to be learned from that failure benefit historical scholarship even today. If there could be twins, one legitimate, the other not, but twins nevertheless — that might perhaps characterize the affinity of *historia* and *fabula*. Our heritage of the past is composed of fact and fiction. We must distinguish them, when and where we can, and acknowledge legitimacy proved by authentic records. But we must also recognize that the twins are bonded in fate, that *fabula* is an integral part of the past. Our understanding of history should ultimately lead to judgement, but our enjoyment of history should be derived from understanding, not from judging.

²⁰ See above pp. 33-36.

APPENDIX ONE

RENAISSANCE HUMANISM AND THE PROBLEM OF GRACE WITHOUT BAPTISM

As the heroes of pagan myths were incarnated with the historicity of human flesh and blood a problem arose that had intrigued the Fathers of the church and the scholastic theologians. But it is in the Renaissance that it began to receive so much attention that it presents a distinctive element of thought in that period. All men and women of the past were alive in the hereafter, but to enjoy the bliss of Paradise one had to be a baptized Christian. Or had one? So much information could be gathered about ancient pagans of exemplary conduct and admirable probity, about the pristine benefactors of mankind, who had tamed the elements and the wild animals and had invented everything that made the lives of their descendants agreeable — was it tolerable to believe that they all were now tormented by the flames of Hell? The church taught that the patriarchs, prophets and kings of the Old Testament and, no doubt, other pious Jews were saved by their faith in the Messiah yet to come. It also accepted that exceptionally, by some special means, God's grace could be extended to a pagan. But whether Jew or pagan, it was difficult to assume that many had found their way to Paradise. Augustine would have liked to think that at least some of his beloved classics had been saved, but he also understood that prior to the Christian era salvation was possible only by special grace and therefore exceedingly rare. Christ was born as soon as mankind began to be ready to receive his Gospel. Since all human beings were predestined, it was utterly impossible that Christ could have failed a single one.¹ In the Christian era, at any rate, so Augustine believed, the Saviour's message was attainable to all who had the grace to receive it, and thus the salvation of an infidel was out

¹ Augustinus, *Epistulae* 102.12-15 and 164. Louis Capéran, *Le Problème du salut des infidèles. Essai historique*, second ed. (Toulouse 1934) 106-32. In general see also G.H. Williams, "Erasmus and the Reformers on Non-Christian Religions and *Salus extra Ecclesiam*" in *Action and Conviction in Early Modern Europe. Essays in Memory of E.H. Harbison*, ed. T.K. Rabb and J.E. Seigel (Princeton 1969) 319-70.

of the question.² In summing up the traditional position of the church, one might say that the gates of Heaven could not be opened wide to pious infidels, lest one depreciate the value of the holy sacraments and denied their central significance in the life of Christendom. Simple folk could be more accommodating and ignore the rigour of theological reasoning,³ but for educated people it was difficult to escape from the logic of that doctrine. Augustine, in particular, guided as he was by his firm belief in predestination, had put formidable obstacles in the way of Renaissance thinkers who wished to review the problem in the light of their growing confidence in man's nature and his abilities.

On his mystical journey Dante often had occasion to be troubled by this problem. On his visit to Limbo he came face to face with the most admirable spirits of the non-Christian world. He was told explicitly that "they did not sin," and yet they were banished to Hell for want of baptism.⁴ Not until near the end of his journey did he muster enough courage to question his holy mentors about a hypothetical man born on the banks of the Indus, free of sinful acts or words, but likewise deprived of an opportunity to hear Christ's Gospel and to receive baptism. Where is his guilt? Where is justice for him? "*Ov'è questa giustizia che 'l condanna?/ Ov'è la colpa sua, se ei non crede?*" The answer is unequivocal and simple: who is Dante that he dares to judge! "*Or tu chi se' che vuo' sedere a scranna / Per giudicar ... che noi che Dio vedemo / non conosciamo ancor tutti gli eletti.*"⁵

The elect are all seated in the Heavenly Rose, rewarded by the everlasting sight of God. As Dante is led to the Rose, he learns that precisely one half of it, with every seat already taken, is the eternal abode of those who had faith in Christ yet to come. This division into two equal halves is bound to give pause to Dante's readers. Perhaps

² Augustinus, *De correptione et gratia* 7.12; *De civitate Dei* 18.47.

³ Among the literary evidence that comes to mind is the famous Parable of the Three Rings (known e.g. from Boccaccio's third story in the *Decameron*) and Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Willehalm*. Specific statements to the effect that not only Christians could be saved were recorded by the Italian Inquisition. See Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms. The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, transl. J. and A. Tedeschi (Baltimore 1980) 51, 62, 76, 125; Silvana Seidel Menchi, *Erasmus in Italia 1520-1580* (Turin 1987) 151-53.

⁴ Dante, *Inferno* 4.34-35; *Monarchia* 2.7: "*Nemo, quantumcunque moralibus et intellectualibus virtutibus ... perfectus, absque fide salvari potest, dato quod nunquam aliquid de Christo audiverit.*"

⁵ Dante, *Paradiso* 19.70-80, 20.134-35.

the point the poet wished to impress upon them was not so much the immense multitude of those saved without baptism as rather the tiny proportion of the elect among the avowed Christians. By the time of Dante's mystical journey, in 1300 A.D., only a few seats remained vacant in the half of the Rose reserved for the baptized.⁶ Dante's pessimism about his own times cannot, however, detract from the remarkable fact that for every baptized elect there is another, who was saved by his faith in Christ yet to come. A whole crowd of Christians *avant la lettre*; who are they? In the Rose canto reference is made only to Adam, Eve and the ancient Hebrews, but elsewhere Dante is led to understand that not all the unbaptized elect belong to the Old Testament. Africans who did not know Christ will yet be found on his side "when the flocks are parted."⁷ Also among the "holy flames" in the heaven of Jupiter at least one representative of classical myth and legend is pointed out to him. He is Ripheus, the Trojan, saved by the "three dames," faith, hope and charity, who in this case substitute for baptism.⁸ To be alive in Paradise — surely this is the ultimate proof of historicity.

Dante had said enough to make a man like St. Antonine of Florence (1389-1459) quite uneasy. He clearly admired and loved the great poetical genius of his own city, but he was also firmly grounded in the teachings of his church. He worried lest Dante might lead astray the mass of his readers, who lacked theological refinement, when he assigned the ancient sages an appealing afterlife in the Elysian Fields.⁹ St. Antonine clearly had a point; the formerly solid wall dividing Heaven and Hell was indeed in danger of crumbling. As we have seen in Chapter Four, both Petrarch and Boccaccio did their share to present the great men and women of classical Antiquity as worthy of pious admiration on a par with the Christian saints. In general, the humanists tended to evade the theological question that Dante had faced so bravely. In Erasmus' colloquy *Convivium religiosum* (1522) one speaker confesses:

Perhaps the spirit of Christ is more widespread than we understand,
and the company of the saints includes many not in our calendar.
Speaking frankly, among friends, I can't read Cicero's *De senectute*

⁶ Dante, *Paradiso* 30.131-32, 32.37-39.

⁷ Dante, *Paradiso* 19.103-11; cf. Romans 9.20..

⁸ Dante, *Paradiso* 20.67-72, 118-27.

⁹ *Enciclopedia Dantesca* (Rome 1970-78) I 308f.

... without sometimes kissing the book and blessing that pure heart, divinely inspired as it was.¹⁰

Another speaker can hardly help exclaiming: “*Sancte Socrates, ora pro nobis.*” Erasmus never tired of pointing out that the path to Paradise was beset with virtues that were taught best by the Ancients. In 1523 he expressed similar hopes for the salvation of Cicero in his dedicatory letter for a Froben edition of Cicero’s *Tusculanae*. It is here that perhaps he came closest to stating that modern heathens too might find grace. Since one felt encouraged to think that many ancient Jews had been saved without the Christian belief in the Trinity and the bodily resurrection of the dead,

how then if a pagan believes no more than that God ... in some way will rescue the good and wreak vengeance upon the bad — what could be more suited to his condition [*accommoda*]?¹¹

The question was also touched in his last reply to Luther, the second book of the *Hyperaspistes* (1527). Erasmus cautiously hedged himself with “probably” and “I am putting this forward strictly for the sake of discussion;” but he did suggest that early in the Christian era many Jews were saved without believing in the sonship of Christ or the virgin birth, simply because these tenets had not as yet been widely announced. The point was — and here Erasmus did not mince his words — that even the teachings of the church changed in the course of time, that no dogma was universally binding and no age, race or person automatically deprived of grace.¹² Never to my knowledge did Erasmus state explicitly that even after Christ’s death pagans could be saved, but neither did he pay lip service to the church’s position that they could not. As he did when denying the historicity of the Homeric heroes,¹³ Erasmus here demonstrated again the independence of his judgement, but again he did it so unobtrusively that few of his readers took note.

The controversy between Erasmus and Luther was typical of a more general, albeit often latent, confrontation. Respect for human

¹⁰ Erasmus, ASD I-3 251, 254. The quoted translation is by Craig R. Thompson, *The Colloquies of Erasmus* (Chicago 1965) 65. Cf. Bietenholz, *History and Biography in the Work of Erasmus* cit. 23f.

¹¹ *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi*, ed. Allen cit. V 339 (Ep. 1390).

¹² Erasmus, LB X 1487-88; cf. V 90f.

¹³ See above pp. 154-56.

free will, as stressed by the Renaissance humanists, clashed with the emphasis on predestination shared among the protestant reformers, who held that justification was by faith alone. This doctrine discounted human effort and therefore tended to view the number of the elect in a restrictive and exclusive fashion.¹⁴ Some reformers, however, were more liberal than others. Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560) was in the first place a Lutheran theologian; disregarding denominational differences, he can hardly be accused of a lack of orthodoxy in his theological views. He always respected the critical threshold for the salvation of infidels and did not claim that after Christ's death on the cross any non-Christian had reached Paradise. Melanchthon, however, was also the humanist par excellence among the German reformers. When preaching on Pentecost and the commencement of Christian mission, he estimated that the Jews who believed in Christ yet to come were, indeed, "countless." The fact that many Jews had left Palestine by the time of Christ's incarnation had an extraordinary consequence. The first divinely appointed missionaries among the pagans were not Christ's apostles, but pious Jews, who imparted faith in the Messiah and thus salvation.

God spread the Jews among the gentiles to this end that the latter might be converted; and since there were many Jews among the [ancient] Germans, I trust that many of our ancestors were converted even before the Gospel began to be preached.¹⁵

Melanchthon's view was in accordance with the best scholarly opinions of the day. Wolfgang Lazius (1514-65) was professor of medicine at Vienna and historiographer to Emperor Ferdinand I. In a monumental work, *De gentium aliquot migrationibus*, (1557) he accepted Pseudo-Berosus' claim that Austria had been settled by some of Noah's kin in the year 131 after the Deluge. What helped Lazius overcome his initial scepticism about such early migrations was a number of tomb stones with Hebrew inscriptions found near Vienna.

¹⁴ Williams, "Erasmus and the Reformers ... and *Salus extra Ecclesiam*" cit. 321, 368 and passim.

¹⁵ "*Viri religiosi innumerabiles fuerunt inter gentes. Deus ideo sparsit Iudaeos inter gentes, ut sic converterentur; et quia multi Iudaei fuerunt inter Germanos, credo multos ex maioribus nostris conversos esse etiam ante praedicationem evangelii.*" *Postillae Melanthonianae* (a collection of sermons preached between 1549 and 1560, first printed in 1594) in *Philippi Melanthonis opera*, ed. C.G. Bretschneider and H.E. Bindseil (Halle and Brunswick 1834-60, *Corpus Reformatorum* vols. 1-28) 24.925.

In his work he reproduced some of these inscriptions and claimed that the earliest one was dated from 2560 after the Creation.¹⁶ Lazius' conclusions may seem wild to us, but in theological respect, unlike those of Erasmus, they were innocent.

Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531), the reformer of Zurich, lost his life in battle for his faith, but he was also a disciple of Erasmus. In the year of his death he addressed a *Brevis ... expositio Christianae fidei* to King Francis I of France.¹⁷ As a protestant theologian Zwingli hoped to enlighten the king on the merits of the pure Gospel, and as a statesman in quest of a French alliance he was prepared to use compliments. But it was also the Christian humanist in him, who received his due when Zwingli acquainted the king with a list of righteous ones he could expect to meet in Paradise. Provided he followed their example, Francis could look forward to the company of the patriarchs, prophets and kings of the Old Testament. More excitingly perhaps, he would find there Hercules, Theseus, Socrates, also Aristides, the paradigm of justice in government, and Antigonus Gonatas, the philosopher-king of Macedonia. Together with these were the Romans, King Numa, Camillus, the Catos and Scipios, and finally Louis the Pious and the other Louis, Philips, Pepins and all ancestors of Francis, who had died in the Lord.

If Zwingli's purpose had been solely to flatter the king with a garland of mythical forebears, he would likely have included Hector of Troy, that ace in the genealogical deck of the Most Christian Kings. In admitting Greeks and Romans to the Christian Paradise, Zwingli maintained in fact a considered opinion, which he had also expressed in earlier works, although normally without mentioning names.¹⁸ But for all his Erasmian latitude, Zwingli was also a theologian. Like Melancthon, he respected the theologically critical line of demarcation and did not suggest that any heathens of the Christian era had gone to Heaven. Even so, Zwingli's list aroused the

¹⁶ Wolfgang Lazius, *De gentium aliquot migrationibus, sedibus fixis, reliquiis linguarumque initiis et innovationibus ac dialectis libri XII* (Basel 1557) 15-23. Grafton, "From *De die natali* ..." cit. 125f. For Pseudo-Berosus see above p. 194.

¹⁷ *Zwingli's Werke*, ed. M. Schuler and J. Schulthess (Zurich 1828-42) IV 45-78. This text was first published by Heinrich Bullinger in 1536, seven years after Zwingli's death.

¹⁸ Paul Wernle, *Der evangelische Glaube nach den Hauptschriften der Reformatoren. II: Zwingli* (Tübingen 1919) 285, 353, 360. Williams, "Erasmus and the Reformers ... and *Salus extra Ecclesiam*" cit. 358f. Williams draws attention to Zwingli's view "that original sin cannot condemn the infants of Christians" and that, quite possibly, some pagan infants are likewise saved "by the benefit of Christ."

ire of Luther. The Wittenberg reformer fully shared the general confidence about the salvation of the ancient Hebrews, but he drew the line at Zwingli's holy pagans — not because they lacked historicity, but on the contrary because they were, all of them, real. To say that they were saved, was a “pernicious error,” Luther proclaimed. In a German tract of 1544 he even went so far as to brand Zwingli himself as a heathen deserving Hell.¹⁹ He had no objection to being himself dubbed the “German Hercules,” but the real Hercules certainly did not belong in the presence of God Almighty. Luther's outbursts did not go unchallenged. Presently Zwingli's successor at the helm of the Zurich church, Heinrich Bullinger, rushed to the rescue. One has the impression, however, that he defends, rather than shares, Zwingli's view. With some justification he accused Luther of having himself taken the position he now faulted in Zwingli.²⁰ Among the passages noted by Bullinger is Luther's commentary on Genesis 4.10, which maintains that some descendants of Cain and also some gentiles might be saved.²¹

Conflicting tendencies can also be noted on the radical fringes of the Reformation movement. Sectarianism sometimes fostered a conviction that only membership in the sect could open the way to salvation.²² On the other hand, radical beliefs also nurtured eschatological speculations and, among them, an expectation of universal access to divine grace in the fullness of time. G.H. Williams refers to the Strasbourg gardener and lay preacher Clement Ziegler, among others. In 1525 Ziegler expressed his hope that in the latter days not only Jews but “also Turks, Tartars, Greeks, and pagans”

¹⁹ *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar 1883-) 44.677 (commenting 1 Moses 47.26), 54.143. Recalling Zwingli's list from memory, Luther actually added the name of Hector, whom Zwingli had not included. The controversy was continued by the Zwinglian Rudolf Gwalther and the Lutheran Johannes Wigand. See *Luther's Works*, ed. J. Pelikan (St. Louis 1955-) 8.133f., 22.285f., 38.290f.; Capéran, *Le problème du salut des infidèles. Essai historique* cit., 242-47.

²⁰ [Heinrich Bullinger], *Warhafftige Bekannntnuss der Dieneren der Kirchen zu Zürich ... mit gebürlicher Antwort uff das ... Schelten D. Martin Luthers* (Zurich 1545), esp. 16ff., 24ff., reprinting also Luther's *Kurzes Bekenntnis vom heiligen Sakrament*, with its attack upon Zwingli. Cf. Rudolf Pfister, *Die Seligkeit erwählter Heiden bei Zwingli* (Zollikon-Zurich 1952) 82-87, 114-29.

²¹ *Martin Luthers Werke* cit. 42.215; *Luther's Works* cit. I 291f.

²² Cf. Acts 2.19-21: “And I will show portents in the sky above and signs on the earth below ... The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before that great resplendent day, the day of the Lord, shall come. And then, everyone who invokes the name of the Lord shall be saved.” See Williams, “Erasmus and the Reformers .. and *Salus extra Ecclesiam*” cit. 323, 363 and passim.

would receive the gift of faith and accept Christ, the true Messiah. Two years earlier Andreas Bodenstein von Carlstadt had held that since the time of Christ's descent to Hell, Purgatory was open to elect pagans. There they could ready themselves for Judgement day and Heaven by studying the true faith.²³ In 1554 an Italian religious exile, Celio Secondo Curione (1503-1569), published his *De amplitudine beati regni Dei*. Curione taught at the University of Basel, but his book was published without imprint at Poschiavo, as its orthodoxy seemed doubtful even to the generally broad-minded censors of Basel, albeit not alone for the reason that concerns us here. In the tradition of Erasmus, Curione urged a cheerful trust in the power of God's love, patience and forbearance with men, though men were far from perfect. If some statements in Scripture sound severe and restrictive, one must bear in mind that — contrary to the teachings of protestant theologians — not all are universally applicable, nor is their meaning always self-evident. Curione's basic contention is that, Matthew 7.13-14²⁴ notwithstanding, the number of those saved surpasses the number of those damned to go to Hell. Saved are not only the virtuous pagans of Antiquity — and here Curione did not mention mythical characters —, but also many infidels of the Christian era, who were not reached by the Gospel message, provided always they believed in the unique God and obeyed the law of nature.²⁵ Curione is explicit about this last point, whereas Erasmus was not. Both together, however, emerge as the forerunners of the theological accommodation theory that would eventually encourage a distinction between truth and myth in the Old and subsequently also the New Testaments.²⁶ The

²³ Williams, "Erasmus and the Reformers ... and *Salus extra Ecclesiam*" cit. 364, 366f. The passage in Carlstadt's *Sermon vom stand der Christ gläubigen seelen von Abrahams schoss und Fegfeur* (Augsburg 1523) is also quoted and commented in Calvin Augustine Pater, *Karlstadt as the Father of the Baptist Movements: The Emergence of Lay Protestantism* (Toronto 1984) 40.

²⁴ "Enter by the narrow gate. The gate is wide that leads to perdition, there is plenty of room on the road, and many go that way; but the gate that leads to life is small and the road is narrow, and those who find it are few."

²⁵ Celio Secondo Curione, *De amplitudine beati regni Dei dialogi sive libri duo* ([Poschiavo] 1554) esp. 7f., 104ff., 123f. 184f., 195ff., 200f. "... Verum illud volumus, sententias [Scripturae] certis personis, temporibus, locis accommodatas a Domine ad genus universum omnesque mortales non esse trahendas." (p. 125) "... Illud mihi videor posse non absurde dicere: si qui intra naturae legem servarunt aut etiam nunc servant, si unum Deum coluerunt, si alteri non fecerunt, quod sibi factum nolent aut factum doluerunt, idem de eis sentio quod de iis qui non solum ante Christi adventum verumetiam ante latam a Mose legem in Dei metu vixerunt." (p. 196). Markus Kutter, *Celio Secondo Curione. Sein Leben und sein Werk* (Basel 1955) 185-98.

²⁶ See above pp. 249-51, 266-69.

kind of Bible exegesis that both promoted was developed further by the Socinians, who also led the sceptical line of thought that we have traced here to its logical conclusion. In Socinian theology Hell does not exist.

APPENDIX TWO

THE DEBATE ON THE ORIGINS OF ROME IN THE ACADEMIE DES INSCRIPTIONS

My attention was drawn to the Paris Academy, because its members continued to exhibit a lively interest in the origins of Rome and thus can give an indication of the degree to which the educated public was preoccupied with this topic. While one or the other of the papers presented by the Academicians were mentioned above,¹ the following survey of their debates would have unduly burdened the text of Chapter Seven.

A younger sister of the Académie française, the Académie royale des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres was in the making from 1663. In 1701 it became a fully autonomous body with statutes that emphasized the antiquarian orientation indicated by its very name. Its chief goal, according to the statutes, was to preserve the memory of outstanding men and their actions through scholarly examination of inscriptions on statues, funeral monuments, coins and public buildings.² In 1717 the Academy began to publish its proceedings in the form of summaries and generous selections of the papers read during its sessions. Many members might be described as gentlemen scholars-at-large. As they were free to address almost any scholarly topic outside the preserve of the Académie française and the Académie des Sciences, their papers covered a wide range of subjects. They mirror the broad intellectual fashions and preoccupations of their times, and many are naive, wordy and even shallow, though some demonstrate superior intelligence and scholarly competence. The numerous topics examined in the proceedings were in many ways interrelated; thus in addition to the papers mentioned in the following survey, many others have at least a marginal bearing on the subject of this study.

In an undated paper read before 1710, Louis Boivin (1649-1724), one of the most assiduous nobodies of the Academy, reported on his efforts to date the foundation of Rome with the help of the

¹ See above pp. 243-45, 284, 305f.

² Institut de France, *L'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (Paris 1924) 3.

chronological indications offered by Dionysius of Halicarnassus and other ancient writers. Boivin had found that ten different individuals or groups were credited with the founding of Rome; Dionysius alone posited three consecutive foundations. Sadly Boivin concluded: “*C’est cette sorte d’érudition qui nous fait connoître l’incertitude de l’origine des nations.*”³ In 1718 Etienne Fourment (1683-1745) produced a series of references to support his contention that the siege of Troy had lasted — not ten years — but less than one. He was answered in the following year by Abbé Antoine Banier, who defended the traditional count of ten years. Both relied on reasoning rather than philology. Fourment tried to demonstrate that through the centuries Homer had never been read with appropriate care, while Banier argued that Fourment’s interpretation did not make sense and that consensus was consensus.⁴ Another popular theme in defence of the tradition was taken up by Abbé Antoine Anselme (1652-1737). In 1715, and again in 1720, he hypothesized about written sources as well as information derived from ballads and monuments such as statues that might have been used by the earliest historians, especially Moses.⁵

It was no accident that the editors of the Academy proceedings placed the second of Anselme’s unprovocative papers just ahead of another, which had caused prolonged commotion in the minds of many Academicians. This was the *Dissertation sur l’incertitude des quatre premiers siècles de Rome* by Louis-Jean Lévesque de Pouilly (1691-1750). When Pouilly read his paper, on 15 December 1722, he was just thirty-one years of age. The man who would later correspond with Fontenelle, Bolingbroke and, occasionally, Voltaire belonged to the young blood among the seasoned ranks of Academicians. Those who were expecting a fresh look at an old problem certainly got it, and perhaps more of it than was to their liking. Pouilly’s paper was a blistering attack upon the credibility of everything that might have served the Roman historians as a source of dependable information. It was claimed they could learn from antiquarian evidence, such as monuments. Could they? Pouilly turned to sarcasm:

³ *Histoire de l’Académie royale des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, with accompanying volumes of *Mémoires*, II, to 1710 (Paris 1717) 428-37, here 433.

⁴ *Histoire de l’Académie des Inscriptions* cit. V, 1718-25 (Paris 1729) 53-61; VI, 1718-25 (Paris 1729) 425-44.

⁵ See above p. 245.

At the time of Tacitus and Pliny there still survived that very figtree, under which a she-wolf, putting aside her natural ferocity, had suckled Remus and Romulus. For more than eight hundred years nature suspended the course of her laws so as to preserve this monument to the concern the gods had shown for the survival of Rome's founders.⁶

What about the famous annals of the oldest times? Their existence was far from certain. If some had survived the great fire set by the Gauls while others were burnt, one would expect the subsequent histories to be better informed for certain years than for others, but such was not the case. The narrative accounts were uniformly coherent and therefore uniformly suspect. What might the Romans have learned from Diocles and other Greek historians? In the absence of factual information, the Greeks had simply had recourse to their own fables when they wrote Roman history. The anonymous Greek *Parallela minora*, traditionally found among the works of Plutarch, showed that Romulus' life, from conception to faked apotheosis, was modelled after various Greek tales. Pouilly referred to Cluverius; his own conclusion that Roman history through four hundred years offered nothing but uncertainty and falsehood certainly matched the findings of the Leiden professor. Pouilly signed off with a poison pill of Pyrrhonist psychology.

The lack of certitude flatters our vanity. We like to expand our knowledge; we search for the truth and when it eludes us we are content to substitute for it such figments as our credulity can fashion. Error seems to us less frightening than ignorance.

The Academy was called back to early Roman history on 30 April 1723, when Abbé Claude Sallier (1685-1761), Professor of Hebrew at the Collège de France, read a paper that was clearly a reply to Pouilly, although his name was not mentioned. A conservative to boot, Sallier simply asserted that adequate records of early Rome had been available to the later historians. In sequels read in February 1724 and April 1725 he tried to prove his contention. He took issue with the *Parallela minora*, in particular, and scored some points by showing that the work was late and that the Greek biographies of these

⁶ *Histoire de l'Académie des Inscriptions* cit. VI, 1718-25 (Paris 1729) 14-29, here 18, also 20, 22, 26, 29 for what follows. Cf. L.-F. Alfred Maury, *Les Académies d'autrefois. L'Ancienne Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 2nd ed. (Paris 1864) 116-21.

parallel lives could have been written by anyone who knew the tale of Romulus and imitated it. One would not want to blame Sallier for not realizing that many episodes reflected ancient mythical material so that the question of direct borrowings was beside the point. Sallier also attempted to document the existence of the pontifical annals from an early date onwards and struggled with the fact that they could not be shown to have offered information on Rome's origins.⁷

On 17 March 1724 a weightier opponent than Sallier girded himself to meet Pouilly's challenge to the Roman tradition. Nicolas Fréret (1688-1749), after somewhat radical beginnings, was then emerging as a pillar of the institution, whose permanent secretary he became in 1742. Pouilly's superficiality had irritated him on another occasion. In 1723 Pouilly had ventured to produce a paper on Assyrian history, a field in which Fréret had done some considerable work. Presumably on account of Fréret's critique, Pouilly's paper was never published in the Academy proceedings.⁸ With his experience of the Ancient Near-Eastern field in mind, Fréret decided that it was time to move beyond the inconclusive haggling over Roman sources. What was needed was a methodology applicable to the entire sweep of ancient history.⁹ Although he had nothing but praise for Sallier and would later support him again, perhaps more loyally than sincerely,¹⁰ Fréret may well have realized that Sallier's position was no stronger than Pouilly's. Before any conclusions could be reached on the earliest history of Rome and the ancient world in general, it was necessary to clarify the notion of historical certitude. This ought to be done, bearing in mind, on the one hand, the new epistemological challenges coming from Descartes and the scientists and, on the other hand, the failure of Scaliger, Petau and their likes to establish a reliable chronology for the oldest times. Fréret's criteria for accepting a historical tradition as factual closely resemble those previously drawn up by Perizonius. The thought crossed his mind that the same criteria might also serve to authenticate a legendary tradition, but in the end

⁷ *Histoire de l'Académie des Inscriptions* cit. VI, 1718-25 (Paris 1729) 30-70, 115-35.

⁸ Renée Simon, *Nicolas Fréret, académicien*. Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 42, ed. T. Bestermann, (Geneva 1961) 107. Feldman and Richardson, *The Rise of Modern Mythology* cit. 93-98.

⁹ Nicolas Fréret, "Réflexions sur l'étude des anciennes histoires et sur le degré de certitude de leurs preuves" *Histoire de l'Académie des Inscriptions* cit. VI, 1718-25 (Paris 1729) 146-89.

¹⁰ Gianfranco Cantelli, "Nicolas Fréret: tradizione religiosa e allegoria nell'interpretazione storica dei miti pagani" *Rivista critica di storia della filosofia* 29 (1974) 264-83, 386-406, here 269.

he rejected that.¹¹ Challenging Pouilly's contention that falsehood would always win out over truth when traditions were forming, he pointed out that a factual account which today could be verified might in future be reduced to an unverifiable tradition as the proofs might perish. Of course, it would not be less true as a result.¹²

On 22 December 1724 it was Pouilly's turn to answer his critics. His long and rambling paper followed Fréret's example in that it too was aiming for a broad, detached view. Pouilly also took precautions lest his Pyrrhonism might induce his opponents to tar him with the feathers of religious libertinism. With Fréret's challenge in mind, he pointed out quite sensibly that mobility and popular success might be particularly characteristic of unhistorical traditions, but beyond that he developed neither a concept of myth nor an understanding of how myths work.¹³ When he eventually turned to the origins of Rome, he quite effectively completed his destruction of the annals, but sensibly no longer mentioned the *Parallela minora*.¹⁴ Pouilly did not have the last word, though. Apart from Sallier's third paper, which was mentioned above, Jean-Baptiste de La Curne de Sainte-Palaye (1697-1781) took the historicity of Romulus for granted in a paper read in 1728. He also singled out Plutarch, whose account of the events he found particularly sloppy and unduly dramatizing.¹⁵ Meanwhile

¹¹ Fréret, "Réflexions sur l'étude des anciennes histoires ..." cit. 153f., 156, 161: "... on est obligé de conclurre, que quand il y a unanimité dans leurs suffrages, cet accord n'a pû estre produit que par la certitude et l'uniformité des titres sur lesquels ces écrivains se sont déterminé. ... Quoiqu'il y ait des exemples de traditions, qui ne sont nées que de la fausse origine attribuée à quelque coûtume ancienne, et que ce qui est arrivé une fois puisse se répéter en plusieurs occasions, la possibilité d'une chose ne suffit pas pour en establir l'existence. Ce seroit conclurre du particulier au général que de prétendre rejeter absolument toutes les traditions, parce qu'il y en a quelques-unes dont on a découvert la fausseté."

¹² Fréret, "Réflexions sur l'étude des anciennes histoires ..." cit. 154f., 160. That the critique was directed to Pouilly must have been evident to all contemporary readers of the paper, although Pouilly's name was given only in a lengthy footnote added to a reprint in Fréret's *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris 1825) 13. Later on in the "Réflexions ..." (p. 186f.), Fréret criticizes John Craig (d. 1731), who applied a theory of probability in order to show how evidence is gradually weakened by continuing transmission.

¹³ Louis-Jean Levesque de Pouilly, "Nouveaux essais de critique sur la fidelité de l'histoire" *Histoire de l'Académie des Inscriptions* cit. VI, 1718-25 (Paris 1729) 71-114. "... on peut même dire des opinions historiques, ce que les physiciens disent des corps pesants, en augmentant leur volume, on n'augmente point leur pesanteur. Une opinion historique se répand chez diverses nations, se transmet aux siècles les plus reculez, sans acquérir une autorité supérieure ..." (p. 81). "C'est ainsi que les mêmes fables, sous d'autres noms, se produisent en differens lieux" (p. 84).

¹⁴ Pouilly, "Nouveaux essais ..." cit. 107-11.

¹⁵ *Histoire de l'Académie des Inscriptions* cit. VII, 1726-30 (Paris 1733) 114-27.

Pouilly had had enough. In 1727 he resigned from the Academy and returned to his native Reims, where he became the Lieutenant-Général of the Presidial Court.

The academic debate flared up again twenty years later. In 1745 the abbé René Vatry (1697-1769) provoked Fréret's ire when he maintained that Aeneas, as he appeared in Virgil's great epic, was for the most part a creation of the poet. Virgil had modelled him after Augustus so as to inculcate the public with the timeless blessings of monarchy. Although he did not say so specifically, Vatry's conviction, which he had clearly held for some time, was that Aeneas had never lived.¹⁶ His paper could not be published until after Fréret's death, when critical views generally gained a stronger foothold among the Academicians. In 1753 even Beaufort, the Pyrrhonist, was awarded a prize by the Academy, although the work for which he was so honoured was not the *Dissertation sur l'incertitude* but rather an essay on the Roman equestrian class, which was never published.¹⁷ This is not to say that Roman history lost its appeal. The Old Regime succumbed to the Revolution and in 1795 the Academy was replaced by the Institut de France. The origins of Rome continued to claim the attention of the members of the Institute, although contemporary developments insured that at first the republican and subsequently the imperial ages of Rome would command an even greater deal of interest. Pierre-Charles Levesque (1736-1812), one of the old Academicians appointed to the new Institute, continued the sceptical approach. Since writing was little practised at the time, nothing certain could be known about pre-Roman Latium, nor was one significantly better informed about Romulus and the kings who succeeded him. The kings might all be legendary, but then, like Livy, Levesque told their story anyway. "*La raison a droit de la juger; mais il faut cependant la savoir.*"¹⁸ Having thus defined his position, Levesque felt afterwards no need to state precisely what he accepted as historical. He prided himself of a critical approach, but what he questioned was Rome's achievements rather than the value of his sources. On the

¹⁶ "Mais il est évident que cet Enée n'est qu'une figure et q'un emblème d'Auguste." René Vatry, "Discours sur la fable de l'Enéide" *Histoire de l'Académie des Inscriptions* cit. XIX, 1744-46 (Paris 1753) 345-56, here 347. Cf. Maury, *Les Académies d'autrefois* cit. 240f., 305, 454f.; Simon, *Nicolas Fréret* cit. 111f.

¹⁷ In 1746 Beaufort had been elected a Fellow of the London Royal Society. Maury, *Les Académies d'autrefois* cit. 123, also for what follows here. Ridley, *Gibbon's Complement* cit. 28f., 31.

¹⁸ Pierre-Charles Levesque, *Histoire critique de la république romaine* (Paris 1807) I i-ii.

floor of the Institute he was criticized by a fellow-survivor from the old Academy, Pierre-Henri Larcher (1726-1812), who stood up for Romulus¹⁹ and the traditional date of Rome's foundation, 753 B.C. Larcher continued to believe that Rome, like any other city, owed its existence to the initiative of an eminent founder; for him the debate reduced itself to the question whether it had been Romulus or another. In short, the Paris savants discussed Latium and Rome in the period of the early kings. So did also Niebuhr, their contemporary; yet Niebuhr's Rome appears to be sited in another universe.

¹⁹ *Histoire et Mémoires de l'Institut royal de France*, Classe d'histoire et littérature ancienne, II (Paris 1815) 307-93: Pierre-Charles Levesque, "Doutes, conjectures et discussions sur différens points de l'histoire romaine;" 394-483: Pierre-Henri Larcher, "Observations sur l'authenticité de l'origine de Rome ..." (Papers presented in 1803-4).

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Der Bapst rufft seine schutzherrn an.



ANGNES AIN WEIB AV. ENGELANT
JOHANNES DER SIBENT GENANT. A. 851.

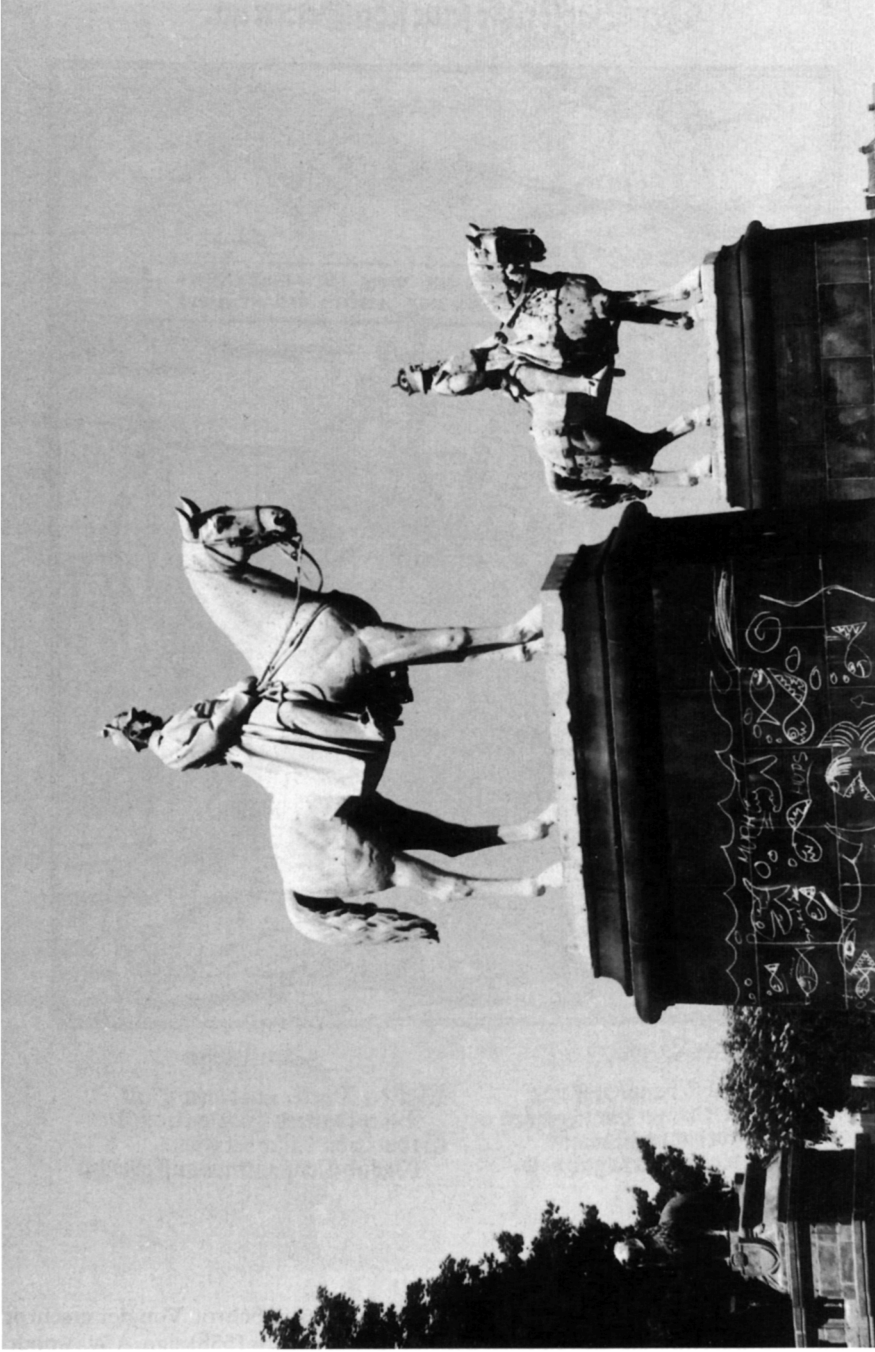
Der Bapst

Ich bin das höchste haupt auff erde
Das höchst Primat mir zu gehöret
I Lehen recht hab ich zu gwallt
Der mir nie dient verfolg ich bald.

Der Kayser

Weill du Datter mit deiner Püll
Besitzst dan erb S. Petrus stül
So bin ich dir billich verpflucht
Was ich Constantinus auff gbricht.

1. The Popess Joan as Seven-Headed Monster of the Apocalypse. Martin Schrot, Von der erschrocklichen Zustörung und Niderlag desz gantzen Bapstumbs (Augsburg 1558) sign. A 5v.: woodcut by David de Negker. By permission of Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nürnberg. See p. 100f.



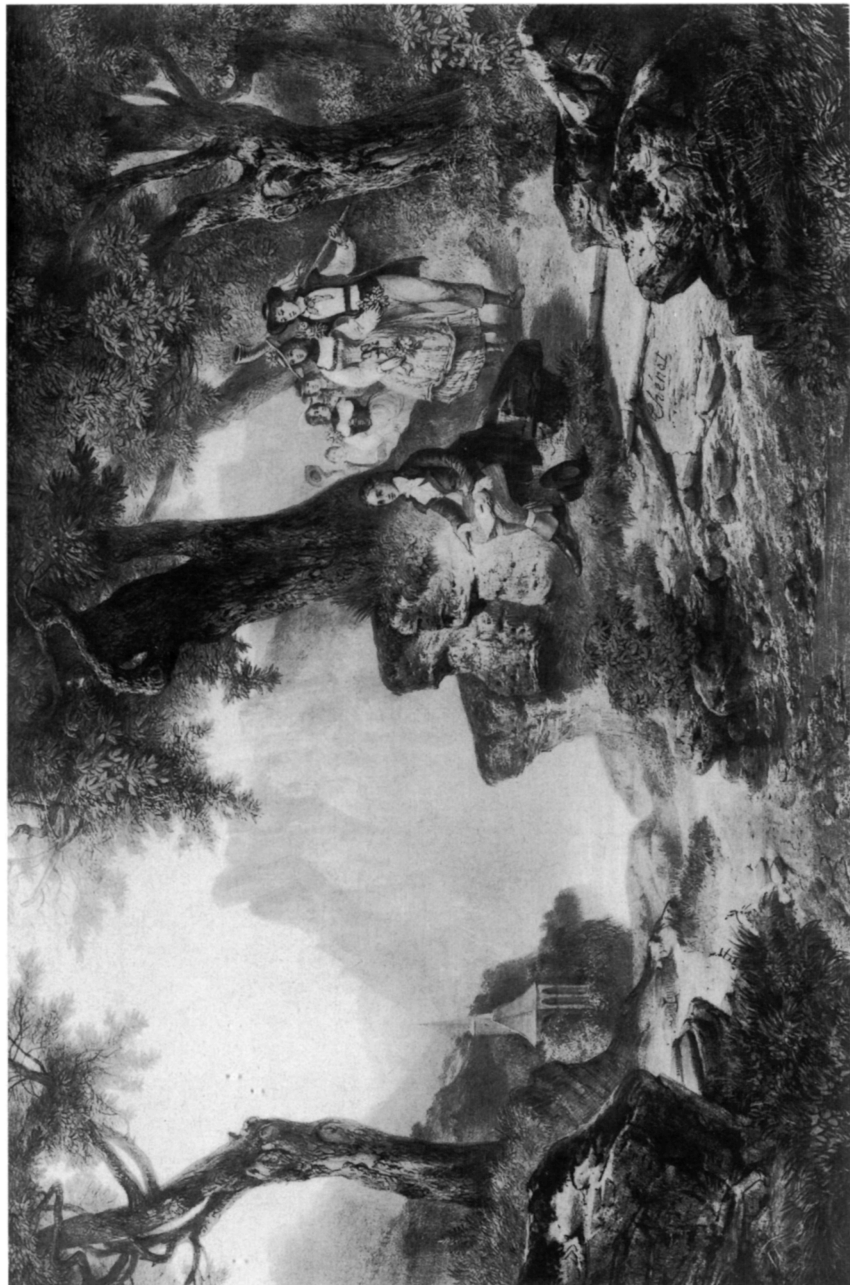
2. *Frederick 'Barbarossa' and William I 'Barbarossa'*: Goslar, Kaiserpfalz, 1893–1899. The statue of "Friedrich I. Barbarossa" is by Robert Toberentz and that of "Wilhelm der Grosse" is by Walter Schott. Photo: Dr. Günther Bundrock. See pp. 143, 395.



3. *Joan of Arc, the Patriotic Version*. Domrémy-La-Pucelle, 1902. The statue is by Antonin Mercié.
Photo: Martin Hottinger. See pp. 169, 350.



4. *Joan of Arc and Her Saints*. Basilique de Sainte Jeanne d'Arc, near Domrémy, 1884–1891. The statue is by André Allar. Photo: Martin Hottinger. See pp. 169, 350.



5. Schiller Composing his Play "William Tell" in View of Tell's Chapel, Lake Lucerne. *Fabula is hard at work here. Schiller never visited Switzerland and the chapel never had a steeple.* Lithography by Jean Pierre Thénod, c. 1835. By permission of the Tell-Museum, Bürglen (Uri). Photo: Fotohaus Aschwanden, Aldorf. See pp. 173, 176, 350.



6. *Famous Writers of All Times, Portrayed in the Studiolo of Federico da Montefeltro*. Urbino, Palazzo Ducale, c. 1470. The frescos are by Justus of Ghent. Photo: Doris Bietenholz. See p. 204.



7. *Napoleon Visits the Pesthouse of Jaffa*. Oil painting by Jean-Antoine Gros, 1804. By permission of the Musée du Louvre, Paris. See p. 386f.



8. *Napoleon Visits the Field of Eylau*. Oil painting by Jean-Antoine Gros, 1808. By permission of the Musée du Louvre, Paris. See p. 387f.



9. *Moltke and his General Staff before Paris*. Oil painting by Anton von Werner, 1873. By permission of the Kunsthalle Kiel. See p. 391f.